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According to the Perspectives of Female Surfers from Sri Lanka.

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Abbreviations

ASDP	Action Sports for Development
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
GMW	Girls Make Waves
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PNG	Papua New Guinea
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDO	Surfing and Development Organisation
SFD (S4D)	Sport for Development
STN	Surfing the Nations
UN	United Nations

1. Introduction

1.1 Personal Motivation and Relevance

Ever since I tried surfing for the first time around eight years ago, numerous other surf trips have followed, and the sport has led me to various surf spots all over the world. Whether I was surfing in Australia, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Spain or Indonesia, I would always notice two things. First, there often seemed to be few *female* surfers in the overall line-up¹, and in turn only a small proportion of these women hailed from the Global South. Second, the women surfers who *had* made it into the water tended to bring inspiring stories with them, telling how surfing has changed their lives in a positive way. Parallel to my personal observations in the water, I noticed an increasing number of articles in surf magazines about women starting to surf in the Global South in the past years. For example, in Bangladesh, some local girls from Cox's Bazaar had gone against the "cultural tide", by engaging in a sport which is almost unheard of in their country and which is deemed unsuitable for females (King 2015; Dukehart 2015). In Iran, too, since 2013, women had been challenging gender norms by contributing to an emerging surf culture in the region of Baluchistan (Britton 2017). And in Sierra Leone, the first female surfer had recently entered the local line-ups, reportedly finding "an escape from the devastating effects of civil war and the Ebola epidemic" (Irwin 2016). To me, all these stories seemed to be related to processes of women's empowerment, and they led me to wonder if surfing might offer a way of transforming gender inequalities?

In development research, feminist scholars such as Cornwall and Edwards (2014) highlight the need to look beyond "classic" women's empowerment strategies, such as micro-credits, and to explore the so-called "hidden pathways" that women integrate into their everyday lives, like practising faith or watching television. In this thesis, I will examine whether sport, and more particularly the sport of surfing, might be one of these hidden pathways. In academic literature, the voices of women surfers from the Global South are almost totally absent, and according to Britton, there is an "urgent need to address the major research gaps in gender, surf and development, in particular the need for transnational research to better inform policy to support best practices" (2015: 10). Thus, I aim to examine the personal experiences and stories of female surfers from emerging surf cultures in the Global South, embedding them into the academic discourses of 'Women's Empowerment' and 'Sport for Development'.

¹ Line-up: The area where most surfers are waiting to catch waves.

Sport for Development is a trending research field in Development Studies, where sport is regarded as a tool for contributing to development goals, such as the empowerment of girls and women. This potential is also acknowledged by various non-governmental organisations (NGOs), development agencies and multi-lateral organisations, as the speech of UN WOMEN Deputy Executive Lakshmi Puri points out:

Sport has huge potential to empower women and girls. In many countries, it has been recognized that sport can be a force to amplify women's voices and tear down gender barriers and discrimination. Women in sport defy the misperception that they are weak or incapable. Every time they clear a hurdle or kick a ball, demonstrating not only physical strength, but also leadership and strategic thinking, they take a step towards gender equality. There is good evidence that participation in sports can help break-down gender stereotypes, improve girls' and women's self-esteem and contribute to the development of leadership skills. (Lakshmi Puri in UN Women 2016)

Nevertheless, women's empowerment through sport is an under-explored area in the Sport for Development discourse, which places emphasis on "social and educational outcomes related to youth sport" (Schulenkorf et al. 2016: 22). In addition, most studies refer to soccer or basketball (ibid.), neglecting the distinct potential of various other disciplines such as surfing. Therefore, I aim to explore whether the sport of surfing might offer different possibilities or risks for women's empowerment compared to "traditional" sports like football. In contrast to team sports, surfing is an individual sport with no formal rules, which may allow a greater amount of self-expression. Furthermore, surfing is an outdoor sport that happens in the ocean, where men and women share the same space. According to Britton, surfing can transform gender dynamics, or as she puts it: "Once you get in the water the rules and norms of society dissolve and the power of the ocean to connect and spread happiness is huge." (2015: 125) Is it possible that a sport like surfing, which takes place in the ocean, might bring other potentials for women's empowerment than a sport which is practiced on land?

In addition, surfing is not only a sport, but also a lifestyle, an industry and a form of tourism. Every year, thousands of surf tourists from the Global North travel to surf spots in the Global South, which might contribute to economic development. However, surf tourism often entails neo-colonial practices and, consequently, brings more harm than good to host communities (see Ruttenberg/Brosius 2017; O'Brien/Ponting 2013). Moreover, the surfing industry is often criticized for its sexist, hyper-masculine, heteronormative and exclusionary "white" characteristics (see Comer 2017; lisahunter 2018). This raises the question: How can surfing, being known for its exploitative and discriminatory practices, go together with the empowerment of women from the Global South?

Partly as a counter-reaction to the harmful practices so prevalent in the surfing world, an increasing number of so-called “Surfing and Development organisations” (SDOs) has emerged in the Global South in recent years (Britton 2015: 121). These fragmented movements can be summarized under the umbrella term “Surfing for Social Good” (Britton 2017: 793) which, as the name suggests, reflects a common desire to harness the positive transformational potential of the sport. Moreover, some SDOs focus specifically on the empowerment of girls and women, aiming to provide them a safe space² in which to learn surfing. For example, THE WAHINE PROJECT, an SDO in California whose mission is to foster “diversity in the line-up”, states that

[...] more time in the ocean becomes a powerful vehicle for connecting girls to their own self-empowerment as well as a way to connect communities of diverse girls to environment, ocean and with one another. (The Wahine Project n.d.)

It often remains unclear, however, precisely what SDOs mean when they refer to women’s empowerment. Do they mean empowerment on an individual, relational or collective level? To which conceptualization of ‘power’ do they refer? According to Ruttenberg (2015), the word “empowerment” is used uncritically in the Surfing for Social Good discourse, without knowing the perspectives of those women who are encouraged to be “empowered”. Similarly, in development research, feminist authors criticize that, with the integration of women’s empowerment into development mainstream, the concept has been depoliticized and turned into a “buzzword” for efficiency and market integration. As a result, it has lost its original feminist meaning, which is the transformation of socio-cultural, economic and political structures and power relations to facilitate greater gender equality (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 3; Batliwala 2007). Additionally, it is important to reflect that inequality is not only based on gender, but also on other categories such as class, race, sexuality or ability.

To sum up: Surfing might offer many potentials for women’s empowerment, particularly in emerging surf cultures in the Global South, however, the topic is vastly under-explored, and the voices of women surfers from the Global South are largely absent from academic discourse. The present thesis is an attempt to fill this considerable research gap.

² In this thesis, a safe space is regarded as a place, “intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary n.d.). Referring to surfing, SDOs attempt to provide women a safe space to learn surfing, by offering them material and supervision of usually female surf instructors.

1.2 Research Question and Aim of the Thesis

In the academic disciplines of Development Studies and Surf Studies, there is almost no research found about the experiences and perspectives of women surfers from the Global South. In the centre of this thesis are the questions, how women surfers from the Global South perceive surfing – no matter if they started surfing by themselves or within the programme of an SDO – and what change did surfing bring into their lives? Are these experiences related to processes of women’s empowerment? The focus lies on the impact of surfing as a *sport*, though it is additionally reflected that surfing is also a lifestyle, tourism sector and commercial industry.

In order to obtain the lived realities of the women surfers, an actor-oriented approach is used. In line with feminist and post-colonial critiques³, it needs to be avoided to re-produce the image of a homogenous “Third World woman”. Thus, it is important to distinguish between the experiences of women surfers from different areas in the Global South and to consider the specific context as well as the intersectionality⁴ of gender, class and race. In this thesis, a case study about women surfers from Sri Lanka is chosen, partly because Sri Lankan women have recently entered the local line-ups and are often supported by SDOs. More reasons for the focus on Sri Lanka are explained in the research design. The thesis is intended to answer the following research question:

How can surfing contribute to women’s empowerment, according to the perspectives of female surfers from Sri Lanka?

In what follows, the different study areas of surfing, gender and development are brought together, in a transdisciplinary approach which is common in Development Studies. This thesis aims to expand the academic discourses of Women’s Empowerment and Sport for Development with a new case study. In the best case, it may succeed in giving women surfers from the Global South a voice, which might offer important insights for the improvement of programmes of SDOs or policy making, particularly regarding surf tourism in the Global South. In addition, it might serve as inspiration for other surfers to become part of the Surfing for Social Good-movement, with a critical reflection.

³ Such as from Mohanty (1984) or Spivak (1988)

⁴ This thesis refers to an intersectional approach of feminism, which acknowledges that inequality is not only structured according to gender, but also to other categories such as class, race, ability or sexuality (Klapeer 2014).

1.3 Positioning and Methodology

I am aware that I am a researcher from a privileged group from the Global North, doing research about “other” women from the Global South. This can only be justified by the aim to integrate the women surfers’ perspectives into academic discourse, attempting to give them a voice and consequently to sensitize the current Surfing for Social Good-debate in this regard. To overcome these hierarchies, I am constantly trying to reflect my own position, referring to insights of feminist and post-colonial scholars, such as Mohanty (Under Western Eyes, 1984) or Spivak (Can the subaltern speak? 1988).

To answer the research question, theoretical and empirical research is needed. In the beginning, literature research is conducted, referring to academic as well as journalistic literature, such as journals, anthologies, surf magazines or websites of Surfing and Development organisations. In theory, the different fields of Women’s Empowerment, Sport for Development and Surfing for Social Good are brought together. The emphasis of this thesis lies on the empirical research, with an explorative and actors-oriented approach. To understand and demonstrate the experiences of the women surfers from the Global South, a qualitative approach is suitable. As research field, the fishing village and surfer town Arugam Bay in Sri Lanka was chosen, where participant observations, biographical and expert interviews were conducted from end of July until end of October 2017. More about the methodology is found at the research design.

1.4 Overview and Current State of Research

In the following section, a short overview is provided, which also reflects on the current state of research. The thesis consists of three main parts: a theoretical, a methodological and an empirical one. In the first chapter, the concept of ‘Women’s Empowerment’ is introduced. It provides a framework for further contextualization of the empirical material. Women’s empowerment is a well-researched field in Development Studies, with a focus on “traditional” empowerment strategies such as micro-credits. The “hidden pathways”, such as doing sports, are less explored. There was not one study found about women’s empowerment and surfing from a development research perspective. In this chapter, emphasis is put on the work of feminist authors, such as Jo Rowlands (1998), Naila Kabeer (2001, 2005) or Andrea Cornwall and Jenny Edwards (2014).

The next chapter deals with the academic discourse of ‘Sport for Development’, as the potential of sport for women’s empowerment is usually discussed within this field. It is mostly referred to the perspectives of the organisations, which try to initiate women’s empowerment externally. This chapter provides insights for the discussion and comparison of the empirical results later. Within the discourse, there is also an emerging field of ‘Action Sport for Development’, which was coined by Holly Thorpe (2014).

Chapter Four draws on insights from the transdisciplinary field of Surf Studies, which unites perspectives from a variety of areas, such as Cultural Studies, Sport Sociology, Environmental Studies, Tourism Studies or Development Studies. For the purposes of this thesis, the emerging debate around Surfing for Social Good is particularly relevant, as well as studies relating to surfing and gender. The work of Easkey Britton (2015, 2017) is especially important, as she seems to be the only scholar with an explicit focus on the connection between surfing and women’s empowerment in the Global South. This chapter introduces the basic characteristics of surfing, before giving an overview of the history of women’s surfing and the sport’s longstanding gender inequalities. Finally, the field of Surfing for Social Good is defined, providing an overview of SDOs, especially in regard to gender and women’s empowerment.

In the research design section, the methodology is illustrated, after which key information about the research field in Sri Lanka is highlighted. The methods of data collection and analysis, as well as those related to access and sampling, are then explained. The final part of this section entails a reflection upon certain difficulties encountered in the field, as well as a discussion of personal positioning.

The empirical results lie at the core of this thesis, and illustrate the perspectives of the women surfers from Sri Lanka. An effort is made to contextualize the results within the theoretical framework of women’s empowerment, and to discuss these in relation to recent studies about surfing, development and gender. Finally, in the conclusion, a discussion of the results as well as an outlook for further research are provided.

2. Women's Empowerment

Empowerment is a very broad term and is used in various contexts and scientific disciplines, ranging from social work, psychology or management theory to Development Studies or development cooperation. For this thesis, empowerment in relation to development⁵ is relevant, whereas there is no ultimate answer if empowerment is an objective, a pre-condition or a strategy of development, or even development itself.

In general, anyone can be empowered; empowerment is about gaining more control over one's life and expanding one's horizons of possibility. Most often, empowerment refers to structurally disadvantaged individuals or groups, such as people living in poverty, indigenous people or women. According to Rachbauer (2010), empowerment theories in development research can be divided into three traditions: 1) Empowerment as Alternative Development, 2) Empowerment as Poverty Reduction and 3) Empowerment in the Gender Discourse. In this thesis, emphasis is placed on the third tradition because it stresses feminist views and focuses on the empowerment of women. In reference to Andrea Cornwall and Jenny Edwards' work "Feminism, Empowerment and Development" (2014), the term *women's empowerment* is used throughout the thesis.

As women's empowerment is a rather vague concept, an effort is made to break it down on various levels, in order to provide a more concrete framework for the contextualization of the empirical data. It is not a goal to come up with the *one* definition of women's empowerment, as the definition can alter depending on the context. Before looking at some definitions of women's empowerment from a feminist perspective, its history and critiques are briefly illustrated. The concept of 'power' is given particular consideration, because power lies at the heart of empowerment and the different ways it is perceived lead to various understandings of empowerment.

⁵ Development is a very controversial term with multiple meanings. There are many discourses about what development is and what its aim should be, ranging from modernization theory-based assumptions (see Inkeles 1969) to post-colonial or decolonial theories (see Escobar 2004). The latter often reject the term "development", because they identify it as an eurocentric construct for othering-processes and as an instrument to maintain hegemonic power relations (Dietze 2005: 304). Due to the limited space of this thesis, the term cannot be discussed in detail. In this study, development is regarded in the sense of Amartya Sen, as he outlines its different dimensions, such as political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security (Sen 1999: 10). Sen defines development as a "process of expanding real freedoms", whereas each dimension extends the individual's capability to be autonomous (ibid.: 3, 10).

2.1 History and Critique of Women's Empowerment

The first feminist concepts of empowerment emerged in the 1980s and are influenced by Paolo Freire's 'conscientisation' approach Antonio Gramsci's 'subalterns' concept, as well as post-colonial theories. Women's empowerment was mainly driven by feminists from the Global South, who criticized Western feminists for constructing a homogeneous "Third World woman" and for focusing on apolitical and economist development models (Luttrell et al. 2009: 2; Batliwala 2007). The "original" concept of women's empowerment is often dated to 1985, when the network DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES WITH WOMEN FOR A NEW ERA (DAWN) developed an empowerment concept for the World Women's Conference in Nairobi. At this time, women's empowerment was defined as a transformation of social, political and economic structures and power relations, in favour of greater equality between women and men (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 3; Batliwala 2007). According to DAWN, inequality is not only structured by gender, but also by other categories like class or race (Kerner 2000: 10). Thus, women's empowerment is regarded as a

[...] political and transformatory idea that challenged not only patriarchy, but the mediating structures of class, race, ethnicity, – and, in India, caste and religion – which determined the nature of women's position and condition in developing societies. (Batliwala 2007)

In this meaning, the focus of women's empowerment lies on a transformation of structures and is conceptualized as a "political fight". Subsequently, different feminist movements in the Global South developed their own empowerment approaches. A significant feature they have in common is that they all see a shift of consciousness as a necessary pre-condition for building a movement for greater gender equality and overcoming patriarchy (ibid.).

By the 1990s, however, the perception and conceptualization of women's empowerment had changed; with its implementation into mainstream development, it lost its radical claim and became more of a "buzzword" for efficiency and market integration (ibid.; Kerner 2000: 10). The concept of empowerment is now used by so many development agencies, international institutions, governments, NGOs and scientists that it has led to a depoliticization and dilution of the term (Rachbauer 2010: 70). Or as Hickel puts it:

The story [of empowerment] is apolitical enough to be safe for corporations and international banks to promote without undermining their own interests, and compelling enough for them to use as a PR campaign that effectively disguises the extractive relationships they have with the Global South. (2014: 1356)

Critical scholars particularly emphasize that in international development policies, the context in which women's empowerment occurs is often neglected (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 5ff.). For example, Porter (2013: 4) highlights that in mainstream development, empowerment is often reduced from a complex process to a "simple act of transformation bestowed by a transfer of money". However, integrating women into the market does not automatically have positive effects. It can also worsen their situation; bad working conditions, for instance, can create new forms of subordination of women (ibid.; Hickel 2014: 1356).

In order to overcome the subordination of women, structural changes are needed (Porter 2013: 3; Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 8). But as Hickel (2014: 1355ff.) notes, it is sometimes even the actors who promote gender *equality* that are partially responsible for gender *inequality*, by contributing to an unequal global system that exploits the Global South. He provocatively asks, "If the World Bank and the IMF are concerned to see females educated and healthy, one might ask why they have done so much to cut public funding for education and healthcare in developing countries." (ibid.: 1366) Furthermore, Hickel argues that the neglect of structural inequalities results from the narrative of individual freedom that lies at the heart of mainstream empowerment. According to the mainstream discourse, individuals empower themselves through an acquisition of financial resources and skills. This understanding of empowerment transports an idea of freedom, which is mostly based on Western ideology and "focuses on achieving individual authenticity and self-mastery" (ibid.: 1356). Thus, many Western empowerment initiatives neglect local desires and local conceptions of freedom, even though "not all women want to be liberated in the manner that Western feminists imagine." (ibid.: 1368)

2.2 The Concept of Power

Power lies at the centre of empowerment – but what does power actually mean? At a general level, power can be defined as the "capacity to implement" (Luttrell et al. 2009: 1) or the "ability to make choices" (Kabeer 2005: 13). But at a more specific level, power can take very different forms, which have various implications for empowerment theory and practice.

2.2.1 Power as a Zero-Sum-Game or a Win-Win Situation?

For many people, the term power has a negative connotation and is often associated with control, domination or coercion (Page/Czuba 1999). This perception is rooted in the concept of power as a ‘zero-sum-game’: It means that power is a finite resource that is constantly negotiated. If the less powerful gain more power, the more powerful will lose (some of) their power. This perception is closely interlinked with the concept of ‘power over’, in which power refers to a relationship of domination and subordination between powerful persons or groups and less powerful people (Oxaal/Baden 1997: 1; Rachbauer 2010: 49). In practice, power as a ‘zero-sum-game’ implies that power is wielded by dominant social, political, economic or cultural groups *over* those who are marginalized (Rowlands 1997: 11).

In many societies, men predominately exercise more power than women. If power is conceptualized as a zero-sum-game, it follows that the process of women gaining more power will cause men to lose some of their power. This might sound like a frightening vision for those in possession of power, but feminist authors highlight that a shift of power relations is not something to fear (Rowlands 1997: 11). Feminist approaches claim that they do not want *more* rights than men, but equal rights. In other words, “they do not want a ‘bigger piece of the cake but a different cake’ and the increased choice (or ‘cake’) that power brings should not reproduce social inequalities or restrict the right of others.” (Luttrell et al. 2009: 6)

It is argued that through women’s empowerment, men would also live in a more equal society and could “explore new roles” (Oxaal/Baden 1997: 2). “Equally, just as if women can be empowered without disempowering men, men could be freed from the image of being an oppressor” (Batliwala 1995, cited in Luttrell et al. 2009: 6). More equal power relations would lead to a situation in which everyone could make use of their fullest potential – regardless of gender (Oxaal/Baden 1997: 2). Feminist approaches of empowerment emphasize that power does not have to be a ‘zero-sum-game’ but can be a ‘win-win-situation’ as well. They have challenged the traditional views of ‘power over’ by developing an alternative concept of power as a ‘generative force’. Power does not necessarily involve domination by the more powerful, or oppression of the less powerful. According to this understanding, power refers to developing self-confidence and self-awareness, increasing skills and capabilities, or networking and solidarizing with others (ibid.: 1ff.). In a nutshell, power can be seen either as a zero-sum-game

or as a generative force, and in turn can have either negative or positive connotations, as the following quote summarises:

Power can usefully be thought of as capacity generated through social relations and as such both [...] enabling social change and sustaining the status quo. Rather than a resource that can be possessed, acquired or lost, power is part of all social relationships and institutions, shaping the limits of what is possible for people to do or to envisage themselves doing. Power is thus as much a positive force that enables people to bring about changes in their own and other's circumstances as a negative constraint to freedom. Structural inequalities mean that some people and social groups are less able to shape their futures than others. (Eyben et al. 2008: 2)

2.2.2 Forms of Power and their Implications for Empowerment

Different perceptions of power lead to different empowerment approaches and implications. Rowlands (1997: 11ff.) provides a helpful framework by distinguishing between 'power over', 'power to', 'power with' and 'power within'. While 'power over' refers to power as zero-sum-game, the other ones are generative forms of power.

Power Over

The concept of 'power over' is strongly interlinked with power as a zero-sum-game, and means that a more powerful person or group has power over someone else and their decisions, actions, political agendas or thoughts. Power is exercised through control, which can be based on threats, violence or intimidation, and leads to responses like compliance, resistance or manipulation (Rowlands 1997: 13; Oxaal/Baden 1997: 1; Rachbauer 2010: 43f.) Empowerment based on 'power over' implies that women can be empowered by increasing their participation in the system and getting the chance to occupy power positions; in other words, by bringing people *outside* the decision-making process *into* it. Rowlands (1997: 11-13) argues that it shifts power relations within the existing system, but does not change its structures. "Individuals are empowered when they can maximise the opportunities available to them without constraint" (ibid.: 13). According to Luttrell et al. (2009: 9) 'power over' can also transform structures, for example by challenging unfair socio-cultural privileges.

Power To (Individual Power)

This form of power is not a controlling one, but a generative or productive power. 'Power to' is not limited, but can be expanded. It refers to the individual power of people and their potential to change and create new possibilities and actions. With more 'power to', one increases one's ability to resist and challenge the status of 'power over'. The personal potential of this form of

power, however, depends on the structures in which individuals find themselves (Rowlands 1997: 12-13; Rachbauer 2010: 43f). As ‘power to’ refers to individual power, development practice focuses on capacity building and the development of skills, such as leadership skills, as well as on increasing access to resources or markets (Oxaal/Baden 1997: 5; Luttrell et al. 2009: 9). Empowerment based on ‘power to’ also emphasises the realization of one’s own interests (Rowlands 1997: 14).

Power With (Collective Power)

‘Power with’ refers to the collective power of groups, in “a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals” (Rowlands 1997: 13). Through collective action, individuals can gain more power to negotiate their interests than they could if acting alone; their potential to create new possibilities is higher. In practice, the ‘power with’ concept can be implemented through social mobilisation, interest groups or alliances. For example, women’s organisations can take political action or claim rights (Oxaal/Baden 1997: 5; Luttrell et al. 2009: 5).

Power from Within (Psychological Power)

‘Power from within’ is based on self-acceptance and self-respect, which also implies seeing others as equals and claiming respect from, as well as showing respect to, others. According to Rowlands (1997: 13), power from within is “the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes us truly human.” Hence, the concept is interlinked with self-esteem, self-confidence and inner strength. Rachbauer (2010: 50) defines it as psychological or mental power that is the individual’s “driving power” to change. In practice, development interventions focus on increasing self-esteem and building confidence as well as expanding awareness of choices and rights. This can lead to changes in attitudes and stereotypes on a structural level (Luttrell et al. 2009: 9).

In general, different actors in empowerment focus on different aspects of power. For example, feminist theories particularly draw on the concepts of ‘power with’ and the ‘power from within’, whereas actors in mainstream development usually focus on ‘power to’, by increasing skills and access to resources (Oxaal/Baden 1997: 4-8).

2.3 Definitions of Women's Empowerment

In gender discourse, the empowerment of women and achievement of gender equality is in the focus. Women are often structurally disadvantaged in comparison to men because of their gender and their socio-cultural roles – therefore, empowerment seeks to transform unequal power balances in favour of a greater equality between women and men (Rachbauer 2010: 71). In addition, it is important to keep in mind that inequalities are not only structured according to gender, but also according to other categories such as race, class or sexuality. The following three definitions of the feminist authors Srilatha Batliwala (1994), Jo Rowlands (1997) and Naila Kabeer (2001) are often cited in women's empowerment literature:

[Empowerment is] the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the source of power. (Batliwala 1994: 130; cited in Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 4)

[...] empowerment is concerned with the processes by which people come aware of their own interests and how they relate to the interests of others, in order both to participate from a position of greater strength in decision-making and actually to influence such decisions. (Rowlands 1997:14)

Empowerment thus refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choice in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. (Kabeer 2001: 19)

All definitions have in common that they see empowerment as a process, and consider this process to be about gaining more control or expanding one's ability to make decisions or choices. This means that "underprivileged" people – in this case, women – gain more power than they had before. The definitions may vary in their wording, but there are some common elements in feminist empowerment concepts.

2.4 Key Elements of Women's Empowerment

In the following, some of the key elements of women's empowerment are explained, bringing together the perspectives of different feminist authors.

Shifts in Consciousness

Feminist authors highlight that in some regards, women are structurally disadvantaged in comparison to men because of their gender and their socio-cultural roles. These structural disadvantages can have very different manifestations worldwide; examples include the underrepresentation of women in politics, the stereotypes of women as 'inferior' or 'weak', and cultural norms that restrict women from work or other public activities. From a feminist view,

empowerment starts with the awareness of these structural inequalities. At the centre of this lies a “shift in consciousness”, whereby women realize their internalized oppression and unequal power relations and, consequently, claim their rights and structural change in favour of greater equality (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 3). In this regard, it is also important to change women’s self-images. If women see themselves as weak or inferior, external empowerment interventions will fail, because they will not be able to challenge the deep structural inequalities. However, if women start to question what they might previously have assumed to be “natural”, they can change their realities (ibid.: 6). Hence, “Empowerment is not just about enlarging the boundaries of action. It is also about expanding horizons of possibility, of what people imagine themselves being able to be and do.” (ibid.: 16) Thus, confronting stereotypes and norms plays a crucial role in empowerment, because the portrayal of women in the media and society deeply affects how they perceive and treat themselves and how they are perceived and treated by others. With a shift of consciousness and expanding horizons of possibility, other kinds of change and collective action are enabled. (ibid.: 6-18).

The Importance of Power from Within and Power With

Empowerment is fundamentally about power – about the power to redefine our possibilities and options and to act on them, the power within that enables people to have the courage to do things they never thought themselves to be capable of, and the power that comes from working alongside others to claim what is rightfully theirs. (Eyben et al. 2008: 5)

As illustrated by the above quotation, all forms of power play an important role. In the feminist discourse, special emphasis is put on ‘power from within’ and ‘power with’ (Oxaal/Baden 1997: 4-8). ‘Power from within’ refers to the shift of consciousness, and ‘power with’ results from collective action and solidarity; in this sense, empowerment includes a collective self-confidence and a feeling of “We can” (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 7). For example, women’s organisations can change power structures through co-operation. In addition, a group incurs less risk by claiming its rights than an individual does (ibid.: 21-24).

This focus on collective action stands in contrast to mainstream empowerment concepts, which usually focus on the individual and their ‘power to’ empower themselves by expanding skills or accessing markets (Oxaal/Baden 1997: 4-8). In neo-liberal empowerment policies, power is often conceptualized as an asset – something that can be “acquired, bestowed and wielded”. In feminist views, power is more “fluid” and multi-dimensional (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 5f.).

Choices, Resources and Agency

In empowerment theory, the terms ‘choices’, ‘resources’ and ‘agency’ are sometimes used with different meanings, which can cause confusion. In this thesis, I stick to the definitions of Naila Kabeer. She defines power as the “ability to make choices”, and empowerment “refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability” (Kabeer 2005: 13).

To be able to make *choices*, several conditions need to be fulfilled. There need to exist alternatives, and these alternatives also need to be seen. However, factors like institutional bias “can constrain people’s ability to make strategic life choices” (ibid.: 14). For example, many women have internalized their suppression as “normal”, and cannot see alternative ways to act (ibid.). Choices can be distinguished into ‘first-order’ and ‘second-order’ choices; first-order choices are strategic life choices, like where to live, who to marry or how many children to have. These strategic life choices influence other choices of everyday life again, the so called second order choices. They influence the quality of life, but do not have as much impact on one’s life than first order choices. Thus, for empowerment it is especially important to gain control over strategic life choices (Kabeer 2001: 19). This prompts the question, how can people gain the ability to make choices? Choices are influenced by three inter-related dimensions: resources, agency and achievements: “Agency represents the processes by which choices are made and put into effect. [...] Resources are the medium through which agency is exercised; and achievements refer to the outcomes of agency.” (Kabeer 2005: 14)

Resources form the conditions under which choices are made; they can be material (e.g. land, finance), social (e.g. relationships, networks) or human (e.g. knowledge, skills, creativity). The allocation of resources and access to them depends on social structures and institutions, like cultural norms (Kabeer 2001: 20). In the language of mainstream development, resources are sometimes referred to as “assets” or as “capabilities” (Narayan 2002: 14).

Agency is one of the key words in empowerment theory and Development Studies. According to Kabeer (2001: 21), agency is defined as the “ability to set one’s own goals and act upon them.” Agency is more than just the action – it also entails motivation and reflection. Therefore, agency can be regarded as individual and collective action and self-reflection. Agency and resources together form what Sen (1999) refers to as ‘capabilities’, which are the potential that people need in order to live the lives they pursue (Kabeer 2001: 21). In addition, the interplay

of agency and structures needs to be considered. Luttrell et al. (2009: 9) emphasize that structures can influence human behaviour, and human behaviour can influence structures. They define agency as the “capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices”. The capacity of individuals to act independently, however, is influenced by structures, which represent “the rules and social forces (such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, customs, etc.) that limit or influence the opportunities that determine the actions of individuals.”

Context matters

Another feminist insight is that women’s empowerment always depends on the context in which it occurs. There is no “one-size-fits-all” strategy. What is empowering for one woman, may not necessarily be empowering for another woman. It is emphasized that the environment and specific living conditions and backgrounds of women must always be taken into account. Empowerment is a relational process, meaning that it is located within power structures and relationships that influence the outcome (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 5ff). For this thesis, the implication is that surfing might be empowering for *some* women in the Global South, but not others.

Structural Change

Closely linked to the “context matters” insight is feminist authors’ focus on structural gender inequalities, which are a powerful source of disempowerment. Structures play a role in two ways. First, they influence the lives of women and the conditions under which empowerment can take place, and structural constraints can prevent women from choosing their own paths. Second, proponents of empowerment want to transform the power structures that oppress and subordinate women, by making them more equal structures for everybody, regardless of gender, race or class. This can happen through a change of economic, socio-cultural or political structures (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 3-4, 11-13).

2.5 The Process of Women’s Empowerment

Who empowers whom? In general, everyone can be empowered, but one can distinguish between externally initiated empowerment and self-empowerment. The initiators of external empowerment programmes are usually actors in development, such as NGOs, development agencies or interest groups, whereas their “target groups” are structurally disadvantaged

individuals or groups. However, empowerment processes can also be initiated by the “powerless” themselves; they can go down their own pathways. In this thesis, both approaches are relevant. On the one hand, there are female surfers in the Global South who have started to surf on their own and who might thus have begun a process of self-empowerment. On the other hand, ‘surfing and development’ organisations use surfing as a tool for empowerment, and support (aspiring) female surfers by providing them with a safe space to participate in the sport.

There is high accordance among feminist authors that empowerment is a process, and not a static status. The process of empowerment is best compared with a journey: “It is a process best captured in the metaphor of a journey along pathways that can be travelled individually or together with others, in which the nature of the terrain is significant in determining progress” (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 7). Many feminist authors agree that empowerment is not something that can be done to women, nor something that can be bestowed on them. It is done by women. But still, empowerment can be supported by external actors, for example by encouraging women’s participation or providing access to resources (ibid.; Oxaal/Baden 1995: 6). The outcome of the empowerment process cannot be determined or planned; it is a journey that is dynamic and not linear, whereby the women decide by themselves where they want to go (Oxaal/Baden 1995: 6).

According to Cornwall and Edwards (2014: 2), the key questions in empowerment research are: How is positive change brought into the lives of women and how is it experienced? Women’s empowerment can happen in many ways, and can be initiated through a variety of strategies. Well-known strategies for empowerment include, for example, micro-credits, quotas, education and laws. These strategies do not automatically lead to empowerment, however; they are rather “enabling factors” (ibid.: 7):

[...] providing women with loans, business opportunities [...] bring about some change in their lives, including enabling them to better manage their poverty. But to see really *substantial* changes, the kind that can transform the root causes of that poverty and begin to address the deep structural basis of gender inequality, conditions need to be fostered for shifts in consciousness so that women begin to understand their situations and come together to act to bring about change that can benefit not only them, but also other women. (ibid.: 5)

Again, a shift of consciousness is highlighted as a necessary precondition for the empowerment process. Rachbauer (2010: 70f.) states that empowerment strategies, such as micro-credits, should not be reduced to “miracle cures”, as they often neglect structural inequalities and thus

end up in an “empowerment lite” version. The international research platform PATHWAYS OF WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT stresses the need to look beyond classic empowerment strategies, and to find out what really brings positive change in women’s lives by exploring the so-called “hidden pathways” of empowerment. These can be “simple” activities, such as watching TV, listening to music or praying (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 2). Similarly, sport might be one of these pathways, though so far it seems to be under-explored in the discourse of women’s empowerment.

2.6 Dimensions of Women’s Empowerment

As women’s empowerment is quite an abstract concept, it can be broken down into different levels to make it more tangible. A theoretical framework for further contextualization of the empirical material is developed, based on the concepts of Rowlands (1997) and Malhotra et al. (2002). Whereas Rowlands splits up empowerment on the personal, relational and collective level, Malhotra et al. divide it into household (micro level), community (meso level) and broader arenas (macro level). In addition, they distinguish between the psychological, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, economic, political and legal spheres (2002: 11ff.). They particularly stress the importance of the community level, “where institutional and normative structures such as family systems, infrastructure, gender ideologies, regional or local market processes [...] are most likely to affect women’s empowerment” (ibid.: 15).

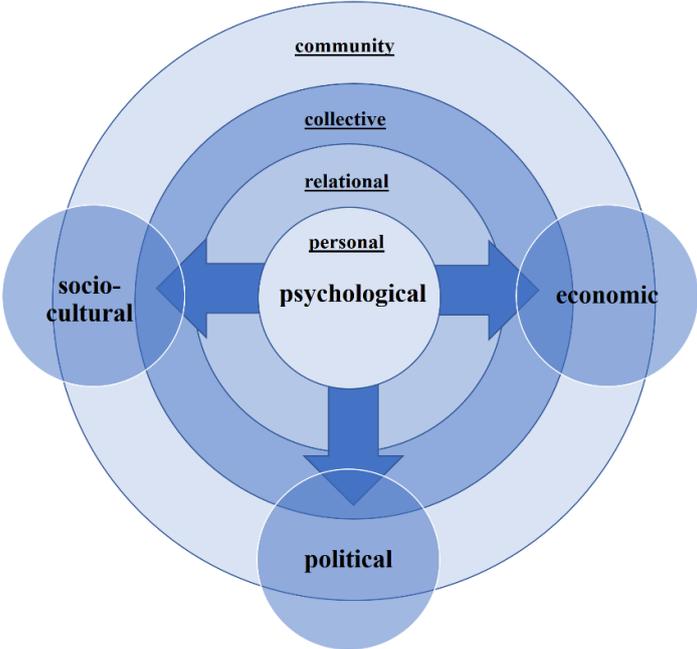


Figure 1. Empowerment as a multi-dimensional process (Author's own figure).

Based on these insights, I have developed a new framework by myself, which conceptualizes empowerment as a multi-dimensional process, including the personal, relational, collective and community level (see figure 1). The psychological sphere is expressed within the personal, relational and collective level; the socio-cultural, economic and political sphere are seen as part of the community level. Building from feminist approaches, the psychological sphere is seen at the core of the empowerment process, representing the “shift of consciousness”. The broader arenas (macro level) are left for future analysis, as my empirical research focuses on the community level. The macro-level (e.g. market or political systems) needs to be kept in mind, however, as it influences the structures in which individuals find themselves. Some of the dimensions interact with each other, while some of them are independent (Malhotra et al. 2002: 15); it always depends on the context. Many dimensions influence and overlap with each other, so in practice it is not always possible to clearly distinguish between them. In the following, the individual dimensions are examined more closely.

Personal Level

In theory, the personal level is about “undoing the effects of internalised oppression” (Rowlands 1997: 15). Women’s empowerment on the personal level refers to a psychological change within the individual, through the development of self-confidence, self-esteem, dignity, psychological well-being, a sense of agency and a sense of ‘self’ in a wider context (ibid.: 11-15, 112; Malhotra et al. 2002: 13). It is based on ‘power within’ (shift in consciousness) and ‘power to’ (skills, agency), and can be also described as individual empowerment.

Relational Level

On the relational level, women develop the ability to negotiate, communicate or defend themselves in relation to others (Rowlands 1997: 15, 120). It is about changing social relationships towards more equality, in terms of status or decision-making. Indicators might be participation in domestic decision-making, or control over sexual relations (Malhotra et al. 2002: 13).

Collective Level

On the collective level, a group identity can develop as well as a sense of collective agency. Individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact than they could have had alone, creating a collective feeling of “We can”. This level is closely tied to the concept of ‘power with’. (Rowlands 1997: 11-15, 116)

Community Level

On the community level, the socio-cultural, economic and political spheres are integrated. This level forms the structures in which women negotiate their empowerment, in relation to other people from their community.

Socio-cultural

Socio-cultural empowerment is about changing society so that people can individually choose how they want to live, and this way is respected by others. It can be defined as a redefinition of socio-cultural rules, norms and symbolic practices (Eyben et al. 2008: 8; Varghese 2012: 59; Page/Czuba 1999; Luttrell/Quiroz 2009: 1). Indicators include, for example: women's freedom to move, women's visibility in public spaces, participation in extra-familial groups, shifts in patriarchal norms or positive media portrayals of women (Malhotra et al. 2002: 13).

Economic

Economic empowerment means that people can think beyond satisfying their immediate survival needs, and thus can exercise agency and choice. It is the "capacity of poor women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes on terms which value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible for them to negotiate fairer distribution of the benefits of growth." (Eyben et al. 2008: 9f.) Having an income does not automatically lead to empowerment; it is also important to gain knowledge, skills and financial resources in order to participate in and benefit from economic structures and to influence them. Indicators can include women's access to employment, control over income, and their access to family resources (Malhotra 2002: 13).

Political

Political empowerment, closely intertwined with legal empowerment, is about increasing participation in the democratic process and representation in political institutions. It refers to "enhancing their [poor people's] ability to speak about, as well as speak for themselves" (Eyben et al. 2008: 15.). In order to participate in political negotiations, it is necessary to have a certain knowledge of rights, as well as the capacity to analyse, organise and mobilise, which can in turn foster collective action (Luttrell/Quiroz 2009: 1). Indicators include knowledge of the political system, awareness of legal rights, and ability to mobilize the community to claim their rights (Malhotra et al. 2002: 13).

2.7 Summary

To put it in a nutshell: women are often structurally disadvantaged compared to men because of their gender and socio-cultural roles. For the process of women's empowerment, the first step is a "shift in consciousness", whereby women become aware of their internalized oppression and structural inequalities. Once they can imagine their worlds differently and perceive themselves as strong, they can become aware of their own interests and act upon them, thereby challenging current power structures. In this thesis, women's empowerment is defined as realising one's own interests and gaining the ability to make choices. Whether these choices can be made or not depends on the structures individuals find themselves in, their access to resources, and their agency.

Women's empowerment is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional process that can take place on the personal, relational, collective or community level. On the community level, women's empowerment is negotiated within socio-cultural, economic and political spheres. There are different views on how women's empowerment can occur. Feminist authors give special emphasis to 'power from within', which involves a shift in consciousness, and 'power with', which stresses collective action. In addition, it is important to gain 'power to', to act upon one's interests and to exercise agency. From a feminist view, women's empowerment is conceptualized as an active process, a "political fight" that aims to transform structures and power relations towards more equality between men and women. In addition, it needs to be considered that inequality is not only structured along gender, but also class or race and that processes of women's empowerment always happen in a specific context.

Empowerment processes can be initiated by external actors, such as NGOs, but can also be initiated by women themselves. Apart from common strategies such as micro-credits, education or quotas, there are many "hidden pathways" that can contribute to empowerment. The effects of leisure activities such as watching television, listening to music, or participating in sports are underexplored in empowerment theory. However, they can provide a lot of potential. The next step is to illustrate how sport – and especially surfing – could contribute to women's empowerment.

3. Sport for Development and Women's Empowerment

Whereas in the discourse of women's empowerment, sport seems to be an underexplored area, the potential of sport for women's empowerment is more examined in the discourse of 'Sport for Development' (SFD), which is an established field within development research and sport sociology. In what follows, this field of study is briefly introduced, with particular attention given to action sports and the potential of sport for women's empowerment. In general, the discourse focuses on the perspectives of sport organisations, which regard empowerment as a process that can be initiated externally.

3.1 Definition Sport for Development

The discourse mostly refers to the term 'Sport for Development' (SFD/S4D), and less commonly to 'Sport for Development and Peace' (SDP), 'Sport in Development' (SiD) or 'Sport and Development' (Hayhurst et al. 2016: 1). In general, Sport for Development is defined as the use of sport as a tool for development, often combined with the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁶ (ibid.). Consequently, sport is regarded as an instrument that can foster poverty reduction, peace-building, or women's empowerment and gender equality. The term 'Sport for Women's Empowerment' does not occur in literature, but many organisations claim women's empowerment or gender equality as their goals (Darnell 2013: 7). The voices and experiences of female participants, however, are vastly absent in academic discourse. In order to decolonize the Sport for Development research and practice, this major knowledge gap needs to be closed by conducting research *directly* with participants (Jeanes/Magee 2014: 135). Nevertheless, only a few studies⁷ were found that include the perspectives of participants in the Global South.

In recent years, Sport for Development has been booming. In development cooperation it has already become mainstream, with strong involvement from development agencies and multilateral organisations (Hayhurst et al. 2016: 2). In 2005, for example, the UNITED NATIONS

⁶ The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 global goals by the UN and replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015. The goals apply to all countries in the Global South and Global North (UN n.d.).

⁷ Such as from Jeanes/Magee (2014) or Kay (2011)

(UN) announced the “International Year of Sport and Physical Education” and founded the UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE (UNOSDP n.d.). The UN highlight that sport can play an important role for development on the individual, community, national and global level because it enhances one’s personal abilities and health, it fosters economic and social growth, it brings communities together and it positively impacts public health, peace and the environment. It is argued that

[...] sport and physical education can represent an area to experience equality, freedom and dignifying means for empowerment. The freedom and control over one’s body experienced in the practice of sport is particularly valuable for girls and women, for people with a disability, for people living in conflict area, for people recovering from trauma. (UN 2005)

Recently, the first literature review about the SFD-debate was published, examining more than 200 publications. It concluded that the debate puts strong emphasis on “social and educational outcomes related to youth sport” and on the discipline of football, followed by basketball. Geographically, most SFD-organisations are based in the Global South; however, more than 90% of the academic papers were written by authors from the Global North (Schulenkorf et al. 2016: 22ff.).

3.2 Action Sports for Development

For many years, action sports were thought to be the exclusive domain of privileged, white, Western youth. Stereotypes of surfers, skateboarders, snowboarders and climbers as hedonistic, thrill-seeking, anti-authoritarian, individualistic youth continue to proliferate in the mass media and popular cultural sentiment. (ASDP n.d.)

Action sports emerged in the 1960s and have been considered as the terrain of “white narcissistic Western youth” for many years (Thorpe 2014a: 5). These demographics are shifting, however, with increasing participation across social classes and countries, including women and minority groups (Thorpe 2014b: 39). In addition, since the 1990s, many new NGOs have been founded, with the aim of bringing positive social change through action sports (Thorpe 2014a: 5). The term ‘action sports’ – also known as lifestyle, alternative or extreme sports – refers to a broad range of mostly individualized sports, such as skateboarding, surfing, BMX or climbing, which differ from “traditional rule-bound, competitive, regulated western ‘achievement’ sport cultures” (ibid.: 1). Action sport cultures have distinct cultural rules, norms and value systems, being appreciated by participants for their anti-authoritarian, self-expressive, non-competitive and creative elements (ibid.: 20). Consequently, a new field

emerged in the academic discourse when Thorpe coined the term ‘Action Sports for Development’ (ASDP). On an online platform that promotes ASDP, more than 200 organisations worldwide are listed, with over 50 NGOs that focus on surfing. All these organisations have different missions and goals, which range from peace-building to community development and women’s empowerment (ASDP n.d.).

Action sports differ from “traditional” sports due to the following main reasons, which provide other potentials for development: First, “achievement is not based on winning”, as action sports are for the most part not competitive. Second, action sports take place in a different gender context than team sports. Whereas in football or basketball the teams are often segregated along the sexes, men and women share the same space in action sports, such as climbing halls, skateparks or the ocean. Third, action sports are self-regulating; instead of relying on coaches, progress is usually made through peer-mentoring. Finally, participants in action sports learn through play. These specific characteristics and values in action sports can promote different “life skills” compared to traditional team sports, such as self-expression, creativity, and a sense of empowerment through skills mastery. (Thorpe 2014a: 2ff; Thorpe 2016; ASDP n.d.)

Another valuable feature of action sports is its “newness” in many countries (Thorpe 2014b: 45). Whereas many “traditional sports” have a colonial history, action sports are something new. For example, Wheaton (2013: 108) identifies that skateboarding is appealing to young, black South Africans because “it represented the rejection of the traditional colonial sports of rugby and cricket.” Similarly, in countries with no long history of action sport culture, the new action sport disciplines are less related to gender. In Afghanistan, for instance, skateboarding is the most popular sport among young girls, which was enabled by the non-profit organisation SKATEISTAN. According to SKATEISTAN founder Oliver Percovich (2014), women make up 5% of skateboarders worldwide; in Afghanistan, they make up 40%. Percovich explains that “lots of sports here are seen as for boys [but] skateboarding was too new to be related to gender” (Thorpe 2014a: 12). Nevertheless, action sports have a history of exclusion and marginalization, with strong forms of sexism, homophobia and racism being present, particularly among groups of “highly committed men” (ibid.: 12, 20). In addition, other disadvantages that come with action sports are higher risks of injury and higher costs for material. Generally, it is argued by current literature that action sports can contribute to the accomplishment of development goals, but it is also cautioned against “romanticizing” their potential. It strongly depends on how the

programmes are implemented by the NGOs, and in which context they take place (ibid.: 12; Thorpe/Rinehart 2012).

In this thesis, it is also argued that surfing differs from many other action sports, such as skating, due to its unique features. For example, surfing happens in the ocean and is a growing tourism sector in the Global South. These specific characteristics might provide other potentials or risks for development and women's empowerment, which are examined separately in the fourth chapter. In the next step, the relationship of sport and women's empowerment is explored.

3.3 Sport and Women's Empowerment

The history of women's sport is full of major accomplishments, but also full of barriers and constraints based on gender discrimination. Sport can be considered as tool to promote women's empowerment and gender equality, and women's participation in sport can also facilitate positive development of the sports sector itself, by providing alternative norms, values, attitudes, knowledge, capabilities and experiences (UN Women 2007: 2ff.). In what follows, a distinction is made between 'Women's Empowerment *through* Sport' and 'Women's Empowerment *in* Sport'. Whereas the first one refers to the potential of sport for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in general, the second one refers to the conditions under which girls and women participate in sport.

3.3.1 Women's Empowerment through Sport

In mainstream development, it is argued that sport can be a vehicle for women's empowerment and gender equality, as highlighted in the following speech:

Sport has huge potential to empower women and girls. In many countries, it has been recognized that sport can be a force to amplify women's voices and tear down gender barriers and discrimination. Women in sport defy the misperception that they are weak or incapable. Every time they clear a hurdle or kick a ball, demonstrating not only physical strength, but also leadership and strategic thinking, they take a step towards gender equality. There is good evidence that participation in sports can help break-down gender stereotypes, improve girls' and women's self-esteem and contribute to the development of leadership skills. (Lakshmi Puri, cited in UN Women 2016)

According to the UN WOMEN publication "Women, Gender Equality and Sport" (2007), sport can bring several benefits for girls and women that are related to empowerment. On a *personal* level, sport can empower women through learning skills and values, such as teamwork,

negotiation, leadership, respect for others or goal-setting. Sport can contribute to an increase in physical and mental well-being, and the development of self-esteem and confidence. When they participate in sport, girls and women have the chance to see themselves in a new light. It allows them to enjoy freedom of expression and movement, and to generate greater awareness of their body and its functions, as well as a greater sense of self-ownership and respect. The UN Women report relates the benefits of sport with the concept of ‘positive embodiment’, which implies that women have the right and responsibility to create an active and healthy lifestyle to sustain vitality in their lives. Positive embodiment allows women to achieve a balance between caring for themselves and caring for others. (UN Women 2007: 2-12)

On a *socio-cultural level*, many girls and women worldwide have fewer opportunities for social interactions outside their homes and beyond family structures than boys and men have. Through sport, girls and women gain access to opportunities outside the house, and can acquire new social networks. It provides them with an alternative avenue for participating in community life. Through sport, girls and women can also develop an individual and collective identity. Sport has the potential to break down negative stereotypes and socio-cultural gender roles, such as that women are “weak” or “only at home” (UN Women 2007: 8ff.). As the World Boxing Champion Myriam Lamare from France puts it: “The punches that I land shake my adversaries as well as the foundations of our society” (Myriam Lamare, cited in ILO 2006). Women’s participation in sport, and particularly in male-dominated disciplines, can “shake the foundations of society”, by challenging sexist gender stereotypes and by breaking down entrenched discriminating attitudes and behaviour (UN Women 2007: 8).

Successful sportswomen can be inspiring role models, and proof that men and women are equal. As UN WOMEN (2018) puts it: “Seeing is one step closer to being”. This is closely related to the “shift of consciousness”, which is often highlighted by feminist authors in the women’s empowerment discourse. Female role models are important, as they can influence other women’s self-perceptions. Furthermore, “promoting the successes of women and girl leaders in the world of sport is an important step in raising awareness and providing encouragement and support to other aspiring leaders” (UN Women 2007: 4). In addition to these personal and socio-cultural benefits, sport has the potential to bring all people together, across boundaries, cultures and religions. Sport is deemed to have the power to promote tolerance and reconciliation (ibid.: 11), which is a major focus in the Sport for Development and Peace discourse.

Many women start to do sport by themselves, and see it as a way of “self-empowerment”. But not all women have the same access to sport, and therefore, particularly in the Global South, many sport-related organisations and NGOs try to provide girls and women with the necessary means and safe spaces to participate in sports. There are hundreds of examples of organisations that attempt to use sport as a vehicle for women’s empowerment. The non-profit organisation WOMEN WIN, for example, calls itself the “global leader in girls’ empowerment through sport”. The organisation supports grassroot projects worldwide, and reaches more than 1.2 million girls in over 100 countries. The disciplines it supports are various, from football to trekking or judo (Women Win n.d.). An organisation with focus on surfing could not be found on their website though. In the discipline of action sports, the most renowned example is probably SKATEISTAN, which has the vision “to empower children and youth through skateboarding and education in Afghanistan, Cambodia and South Africa”, with a particular focus on girls (Skateistan n.d.). There are also a few small grassroot organisations that focus on women’s empowerment through surfing, which are looked at separately in the fourth chapter.

In mainstream development, there seems to be wide acknowledgement that sport can bring many benefits to girls and women (UN Women 2007). Critical scholars, however, highlight the importance of context and emphasize that Sport for Development-programmes can also bring disempowering practices. For instance, a case study about the experiences of female soccer players in Zambia illustrates that although participants might have strengthened their ‘power from within’ and gained more self-confidence, they could not exercise their increased abilities at the household level because family members did not want to give up their ‘power over’. In order to be allowed to play football, the women had to complete extra domestic chores, which consequently re-enforced gender stereotypes and unequal gender relations (Jeanes/Magee 2014). In addition, it needs to be considered that the perspectives of female participants in SFD-programmes in the Global South are so far hardly integrated into academic discourse (ibid.).

3.3.2 Women’s Empowerment in Sport

In order to attain women’s empowerment through sport, the gender inequality that currently exists in sport needs to be addressed and tackled. In her speech at the 5th IOC World Conference on Women and Sport, the UN WOMEN Deputy Executive Director Lakshmi Puri pointed out

that not all girls and women have the same opportunities to participate in sports, giving the example of a young surfer girl from Bangladesh:

I have recently heard the story of Nassima Atker, a 15-year-old girl who took up surfing in Bangladesh. Surfing is not a typical sport in this country, where men rarely go in the water unless they are fishermen, and many parents do not allow their daughters to swim after the age of 12. Yet efforts to create a local surf club have resulted in many young people becoming passionate about this sport. Just a year ago, more girls than boys belonged to the club. But as surfing gained popularity, some community leaders felt that surfing was inappropriate for women and girls. Since then, almost every female club member has left. Nassima is the only one left. (Lakshmi Puri 2012).

Puri highlights that if Nassima lived in California, she would have the opportunity to compete on an international level and would perhaps get the chance to become Bangladesh's first surf star. The example of Nassima shows that participation in sport highly depends on the surrounding structures, which are often restrictive for women. However, these restrictions are not only due to gender, but also due to class, race, ability and other categories.

So, what kind of inequalities do women face in the world of sports? In what ways are they restricted from participation? In general, both in the Global North and the Global South, women are less valued in sports than men, which often causes them to suffer from inadequate resources or unequal wages and prizes. In the media, women are often presented in a way that reflects and reinforces stereotypes. In addition, violence, harassment and exploitation against women in sports are common, which is one consequence of the sexualization of female athletes (UN Women 2007: 3, 26). *Physical* barriers include a lack of appropriate facilities, programmes and resources for women. For example, sports apparel is often not appropriate for Muslim women. *Socio-cultural* barriers are often based on the perception that women are physically inferior to men. This can lead to a lack of culturally relevant role models. Also, there is a stereotypical classification of disciplines into "masculine" and "feminine", which leads to some women being pushed into 'aesthetic' sports such as gymnastics or ballet, and other women being negatively labelled as "manly" or "unfeminine" if they participate in disciplines such as boxing or rugby. Another constraint is that women are most often responsible for the housework and childcare, which restricts their engagement in community activities, including sports. (UN Women 2007: 13-19)

It is important to consider that access to sports always depends on the context. For example, in many countries in South Asia, such as Sri Lanka, women's restricted mobility prevents them from participating in sports that take place in public spaces. Sri Lankan scholar Samantha Nanayakkara (2012: 1887) states that in South Asia, only a small percentage of women

participate in sports, and argues that “the gender order of a society and the gender equality balance are closely intertwined with the structure of sport and the conditions of playing sport”, which means that the gender relations in sports reflect underlying inequalities on a societal level. Consequently, she argues that women’s participation in sports is relevant for socio-cultural and economic empowerment. She also emphasizes that the topic of women in sports in South Asia is an underexplored field in academia, and criticizes the fact that sport is often viewed “through a ‘gender lens’ of white women’s experiences”, neglecting the complex relationships between gender, race, ethnicity and class (ibid.: 1888).

According to Nanayakkara (2012: 1887ff.), there are *cultural, social, economic* and *political* barriers that can prevent women in South Asia from participating in sport, which might also concern female surfers from Sri Lanka. As *cultural barriers*, she names religious traditions and cultural norms by which women are expected to be subservient to men, and which impose religious observances. For example, many South Asian women are restricted from participating in sports because Western sports apparel is regarded as inappropriate and incompatible with women’s pride and dignity. Additionally, in South Asian countries like Sri Lanka, maintaining virginity before marriage is considered important and consequently, women are constrained from sport as there is a lack of awareness of sport injuries and their affection on virginity. Nevertheless, it is emphasized that “religion as a whole is not the common determinant in unequal power relations” (ibid.: 1888), as for example Hindu traditions differ from Buddhist ones. As *social barriers*, Nanayakkara identifies the unequal distribution of household and childcare duties, which are expected to be performed predominately by women, as well as the restrictions placed on women by their husbands. Furthermore, a lack of opportunities to properly coach women, a lack of female representatives in sport federations, and a lack of media coverage about sportswomen, all hinder women from participating in sports (ibid.: 1899). *Political barriers* refer to the impact of military conflicts, such as the decades-long civil war in Sri Lanka, which destroyed previously safe social environments, and resulted in the exclusion of women from sports due to personal safety concerns (ibid.). *Economic barriers* exist because many South Asian countries are economically impoverished. Thus, there is relatively limited government spending on sport and recreational activities, and the people prioritize their more immediate survival needs. Many women are excluded from sports because they do not have the financial means to participate, or because many remote areas do not possess appropriate facilities and infrastructure (ibid.).

3.4 Summary

This chapter shows that in mainstream development, sport is considered an important tool for development and women's empowerment and gender equality. For example, it is argued that sport can contribute to women's empowerment by increasing physical and mental well-being, by providing access to activities and networks outside the house, by fostering the development of skills and values, such as teamwork, respect, self-esteem or leadership and by challenging stereotypes and socio-cultural roles prescribed to women. Despite all these benefits, however, it must be acknowledged that sport can also lead to disempowering practices, such as the re-enforcement of gender norms and stereotypes. Additionally, not all women have the same access to sports, and might be restricted due to socio-cultural, economic and political barriers.

The impact of Sport for Development programmes tends to be researched in a rather general manner, usually without reference to the specific characteristics of the various disciplines, and very often neglecting the perspectives of sports participants in the Global South. In recent years, the new field of Action Sports for Development has emerged, which highlights the distinctive norms and benefits of action sports, such as skateboarding or surfing, that might bring other potentials for development as compared to "traditional" team sports like football or basketball. Nevertheless, there are hardly any existing case studies about the relationship between women's empowerment and action sports, or surfing in particular.

4. Surfing for Social Good

In relation to the discourse of ‘Sport for Development and Women’s Empowerment’, several important questions arise. What distinguishes surfing from other sports? How equal is surfing in terms of gender? And finally, how might surfing contribute to women’s empowerment, particularly with regard to women from the Global South? In general, surfing is not only a sport, but also a form of tourism and a lifestyle, with a multi-billion-dollar industry behind it. The main focus of this study is on surfing as a sport; but of course, it also needs to be considered in terms of its lifestyle, tourism, and industry attributes.

4.1 Characteristics of Surfing

Surfing is the act of riding waves with a surf board. In this thesis, the term does not refer to any other types of surfing, such as windsurfing, kitesurfing, stand up paddling, body boarding or body surfing. The sport of surfing is gaining more and more popularity across the globe. There are no official figures on how many people are engaged in it, but estimates suggest that there are between 17 and 35 million surfers worldwide, with about 81% of them being male and 19% female (Surfer Today 2018). Surfing is also going to be Olympic – it is included in the next Olympic Games in Tokyo 2020 for the first time (ISA n.d.).

The act of riding waves has already been practiced for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. It can be traced back to ancient Polynesian times, when chiefs and chieftesses would ride waves on large wooden surf boards. In recent decades, surfing has spread across the globe – from the first “modern” surf cultures, such as Hawaii, Australia or California, to the most isolated corners of the world, as surfers are always on the search for undiscovered and uncrowded waves. As surfing has been introduced to communities with no surfing history, new surf cultures have begun to emerge all over the world, for example in Iran, Sierra Leone and Russia. Surfing is becoming more and more common in the Global South, where some of the best and most consistent surf spots in the world can be found. (Warshaw 2010)

Surfing can be variously defined as an action sport, lifestyle sport, extreme sport, outdoor sport, nature sport or water sport. The purpose of this section, rather than classifying surfing into one of these categories, is to highlight its specific characteristics and values. Surfing is an individual sport that takes place in the ocean, and increasingly also in rivers and artificial wave pools.

Most surfers would probably agree that surfing is a “magical” sport, which allows a connection to oneself, to others and to nature. There is a well-known saying that “only a surfer knows the feeling”, which means that it is difficult to explain to others, who have never tried surfing, what is so special about it. This saying is related to the “stoke” and the “flow”, which most surfers are familiar with. The “stoke” is an intense feeling of being “excited, pleased, happy or thrilled” after riding a wave (Encyclopedia of Surfing n.d.), whereas the “flow” describes a state of just “being” in the present moment. As Kelly Slater, an 11-time world champion, once put it: “Not to sound too deep or weird, but I think that the times when you really appreciate surfing are the times you’re really sort of becoming one with the nature.” (Kelly Slater, cited in Metcalfe 2017) This quotation illustrates that there is a spiritual element in surfing.

As is true with many other action sports, recreational surfing has no formal rules, which allows participants a great amount of self-expression and creativity (Thorpe 2014b). There is, however, an informal surf etiquette, which helps determine who has priority for each wave. In surfing, achievement is not based on winning. There is, however, a competitive element in it, because surfers share the same waves and only one surfer at a time is supposed to ride one. Hence, when a surf spot is “crowded”, surfers sometimes start “fighting” for waves. This can sometimes lead to aggressive behaviour in the water, which is known as “surf rage” (Warshaw 2005: 671f.).

Furthermore, surfing is often linked to a distinct “*surfer lifestyle*” and sub-culture with its own language, music or fashion style. Surfers are regularly associated with stereotypes, such as the “hippie”, the “rebel” or the “sexy surfer girl”, but indeed, surfers are not a homogenous group and their identities are flexible, changing with history, region and context. In general, however, there is a trend that surf culture evolved from the “soul surfing movement” in the 1960s – which regarded surfing as part of the counter-culture and an “escape from bourgeois society” – to a more competitive, commercialized and institutionalized form in the present day (Wheaton 2013: 42; Thorpe 2006: 213ff.). As surfing nowadays often occurs in a neo-liberal context, “surfing has increasingly embraced capitalist culture via professionalisation” (Wheaton 2013: 42).

In addition, surfing is a burgeoning part of the *tourism sector*, with thousands of surfers and aspiring surfers travelling to suitable coastal areas, often situated in the Global South, such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Nicaragua or the Philippines. As with every form of tourism, surf tourism can bring positive as well as negative effects to host communities (Usher/Kerstetter 2014).

However, surf tourism is frequently accused for entailing a neo-colonial character, as “surfers tend to venture into areas previously unvisited by mainstream tourists, opening up new routes and systems of development (Ponting et al. 2005: 152). Thus, if surf tourism happens in an unregulated way, it can cause more harm than good to host communities in the Global South, destroying local cultures, economies and the environment (O’Brien/Ponting 2013; Ruttenberg/Brosius 2017). Furthermore, surfing is regularly criticized for its sexist, hyper-masculine, heteronormative and “white” *industry*. As Tetsuhiko Endo, a surf writer with a degree in Postcolonial Studies, critically articulates:

Surfing is not the sport of kings, not as those pagan kings we knew it. It is the ill-begotten child of colonialism and travel marketing, resurrected from the crucified remains of an indigenous culture to serve the global curio market as the king of the exotic commodities. (2016: 85)

As a consequence, a new field of Critical Surf Studies is emerging, with scholars increasingly exploring surfing in relation to gender, sexuality or race, and “reclaiming the roles that women, indigenous peoples, and people of color have played in surfing” (Hough-Snee/Sotelo Eastman 2017).

4.2 Women’s Surfing

“In the vast majority of scholarship on surf culture the perspective of surfing ‘Others’ – women, ethnicities and sexualities – are not expressed.” (Evers 2009: 895) Nevertheless, there is a rich and growing body of academic research about women’s surfing from a transdisciplinary and feminist perspective⁸. For example, several journal articles were found about gendered spaces and sexism in surfing, or the media portrayal of female surfers. This research, however, is mostly conducted in relation to the experiences of women surfers in the Global North, particularly in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom. As Olive et al. (2018: 150) state: “While women’s voices have gained space, similar to surf media, these remain largely white, core, and heteronormative.” After conducting an extensive literature research, I was able to conclude that there seems to be almost no scientific research about the experiences of women surfers from the Global South. Similarly, Britton, one of the few scholars who deals with the topic, states:

⁸ Such as from Krista Comer (2010), Belinda Wheaton (2013), Rebecca Olive (2016), lisahunter (2018) or Georgina Roy and Jayne Caudwell (2014)

Female voices especially from emerging surf cultures in developing countries are largely absent from current discourse on surf culture and development in mainstream media, academic work and funded development programmes. (2017: 793)

In the literature review, only a handful of journal articles about the experiences of women surfers from the Global South were found⁹. In these articles, it is referred to women surfers from Iran, Brazil and Morocco, and their experiences and self-perceptions of the sport. This lack of research might be explained by the newness of women's surfing in the Global South. Nevertheless, there is an increasing media coverage about female surfers from the Global South in surf magazines and documentaries, portraying the stories of female pioneer surfers from India, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Iran or Bangladesh. In the following, a short history of women's surfing is provided, along with an attempt to shed light on women surfers from the Global South, whose histories have not been documented in academic research yet.

4.2.1 History of Women's Surfing

Surfing has not always been a male-dominated sport as it is today. The art of wave sliding has been practiced for centuries in the Polynesian islands and it is assumed that back in the days, surfing was a sport equally practiced by men and women (Warshaw 2010: 23ff; Masterson 2018: 191). The earliest records of surfers are found in the drawings of English explorer James Cook, made during his 18th century voyage to Hawaii, depicting Polynesian women surfing together with men (Britton 2015: 120). "Women surfers in ancient Hawaii rode alongside the men, had surf breaks named in their honor, were depicted in engravings and even mythologized." (Warshaw 2005: 704) After European missionaries arrived in Hawaii, surfing was outlawed, and for the next 125 years the sport almost disappeared, only being practiced by a minority. One of the few surfers during this period was the Royal Hawaiian princess Ka'iulani, who was described as the "last of the old school at Waikiki" in the 1880s (Britton 2015: 120). However, after surfing began to regain its popularity around 1900, it turned into a male domain.

But when the sport was resurrected in the early 20th century after nearly disappearing the previous few decades, it was practiced almost exclusively by men and boys, and gender imbalance was the rule as the sport was exported from Hawaii to America, Australia, Europe and beyond. (Warshaw 2005: 704)

Duke Kahanamoku, known as the father of modern surfing, brought surfing from Hawaii to the rest of the world. In 1914, he introduced surfing in Australia, where he chose 15-year-old Isabel

⁹ See Britton (2017), Guibert/Arab (2017), Knijnik et al. (2010)

Letham to tandem surf with him at his first surfing demonstration in Sydney, making Letham the first Australian surfer and pathing the way for other women surfers to follow (ibid.: 335). But when surfing spread from Hawaii, Australia and California to the rest of the globe, it was mostly men who participating, due to socio-cultural norms that prevented women from participating in leisure activities (ibid. 704). Consequently, modern surfing in Western culture has “undeniably a male-dominated history” (Ford/Brown 2006: 94).

It was not until the 1950s that women increasingly participated in surfing. One boost to women’s surfing was the release of the novel “Gidget” in 1957, which was based on the real story of Malibu surfer Kathy Kohner. After being turned into a Hollywood movie in 1959, Gidget exposed surfing to the mainstream and became a role model for many women surfers (Warshaw 2005: 224f.). Other milestones followed; for example, multiple World Champion Lisa Andersen pushed women’s surfing “to the next level”, and made it as one of the first women on the cover of a major surf magazine in 1995 (ibid. 16). Or in 1999, Sarah Gerhardt became the first woman to surf the famous big wave ‘Mavericks’, preparing the ground for women’s big wave surfing (ibid.: 222). Another pioneer in big wave surfing is Keala Kennelly, who was the first woman to win the WSL Big Wave Awards 2016 for the best “tube ride”, beating the best male surfers in the world (WSL 2016). The history of modern women’s surfing seems to be dominated by pioneering female surfers from the Global North, and so is the current state – which particularly refers to professional surfing. For instance, in the last 40 years of women’s competitive surfing, 20 world champions were from Australia, 18 from the United States (including Hawaii), and just one each from South Africa and Peru (WSL n.d.). Also in 2017, the vast majority of female surfers participating in the Women’s Championship Tour of the World Surf League were from the Global North, with only three women from Brazil or South Africa (WSL 2017).

Nevertheless, in the last few years, an increasing number of women from the Global South has entered their local surf spots. In the Global South, women’s surfing is on the rise, as the following selected examples illustrate: In 2007, Ishita Malviya became the first female surfer from India and is now a celebrated sport star, being the role model of young Indian girls (Pandey 2014). Not far from India, in the beach town Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh, some local girls are “paddling through patriarchy”, by going surfing despite the attempts of certain community leaders to stop them (Dukehart 2015; King 2015). In 2013, surf culture in Iran was started by pioneering sports women, who then passed on the passion for surfing to other girls and women

(Britton 2017). In Sri Lanka, the first GIRLS MAKE WAVES event took place in 2015, enabling young girls and women to try surfing for the first time (Dsouza/Langeh 2016). Or in 2017, Flora Christin Butarbutar became the first competitive long boarder from Indonesia (Whittaker 2017). On the African continent the same holds true: For instance, in Morocco women are increasingly participating in surfing, with a few already taking part in international competitions (Kuhn 2018). Or in Sierra Leone, Kadiatu Kamara, also known as KK, became the first female surfer, sharing the line-up with the local boys (Irwin 2016). Women's surfing in the Global South is a young phenomenon – and history is just about to be written. Even though they were and still are restricted from the sport, recent developments show that they found ways to negotiate their constraints.

4.2.3 Gender Inequality in Surfing

The history of women's surfing is full of accomplishments, but also full of discrimination, sexism and restrictions. Despite the fact that women are increasingly participating in surfing, it is still a male domain: according to estimates of the International Surfing Association, women make up around 19% of the world's surfing population (Surfer Today 2018).

Ford and Brown (2008: 83ff.) state that in modern surfing culture, a “hegemonic masculinity” has been found throughout its history. With the institutionalization of surfing, patterns of gender inequality were established, which are most visible in the “three-way coalition between (professional) sponsorship, advertising and media” (Ford/Brown 2008: 98). In sponsorship, women are often reduced to their bodies, and even the best athletes in the world have difficulties finding a sponsor if they do not suit the image of the sexy surfer girl. For example, Silvana Lima, despite being Brazil's best female surfer, reports about struggles in finding sponsorship because she does not look like a model (lisahunter 2017: 1f.). This is similar in advertising, where women are often sexualized. For instance, in 2013, the surf brand Roxy, which is the largest women's surf apparel brand worldwide, produced a video to promote an international surf competition that reminds of a “soft porn”. As the blogger Kristie Thompson wrote: “With 12 butt shots in just over a minute, no face ever shown, and zero waves ridden, this video does a very fine job of reducing the image of women surfers to body parts alone” (Thompson 2013). Women are also under-represented in media coverage of surf magazines, and if so, they are often not acknowledged for being athletes. For example, Henderson examined in her content analysis study the portrayal of women in the Australian surfing magazine “Tracks” from 1994 to the early 2000s, concluding that women were often portrayed in similar ways as in the 1970s,

where they were “represented in photographs as passive objects of male desire, in various states of undress, and rarely surfing” (2001: 323). Another issue refers to professional surfing, where women are not paid equal prize money at the World Surf League or have to surf in less good conditions than men do (Fleming 2016). Furthermore, women were excluded from participating in surf competitions with bigger waves – it was not until 2018, after a fight for two decades, that women secured their own competition at the famous big wave spot ‘Mavericks’ (Cross 2018).

As a counter-reaction to this institutionalized sexism, a new feminist surf movement has evolved, mostly situated in the Global North. With grassroot initiatives and collaborations, such as THE INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN SURFERS or platforms like SURFEMINISM or THE INSPIRE INITIATIVE, women’s surfing is aimed to be transformed towards more equality, for gender and beyond (Comer 2017). As former longboard world champion and activist Cori Schumacher states: “There is a growing movement of female surfers who believe surfing can be more than simple escapism or competitive sport” (The Inspire Initiative 2015). Within this discourse, the term “Surfeminism” was created. According to Comer (2017), the term has no set meaning yet, referring to a transformation of the unequal structures in surfing and criticising the “industry’s exploitation of elite stars and images of women across global surf media, and offers itself as counterdiscourse”. For Schumacher, Surfeminism “takes third-wave feminist commitments, identified through ‘intersectionality’ and puts them in service of the life of the body that surf women live individually, and live as groups.” (ibid.). Schumacher’s statement already highlights the intersectionality, i.e. that surfing is not only structured unequally along gender, but also along race, sexuality or ability. In relation to this, new initiatives have emerged, such as the BLACK SURFER ASSOCIATION or the online platform gaysurfers.net (Trujillo 2013; Gaysurfers.net n.d.).

4.3 Surfing for Social Good

As mentioned, new social movements, initiatives, collaborations and NGOs have recently evolved in the surfing world, with the aim of making surfing more inclusive and contributing to development goals. According to Britton (2017: 794), these initiatives are “building into social change movement”, which can be summarized under the umbrella term of “Surfing for Social Good” (SSG), where surfing is regarded as “vehicle or platform, for creating connection and addressing deeper social and ecological issues.” This is reminiscent of the Sport for Development discourse, with surfing offering new and alternative chances and risks than more well-explored disciplines such as football or basketball.

In the transdisciplinary field of Surf Studies, surfing and its role in “sustainable development” is a key research area¹⁰. The concept of sustainable development is often based on the three pillars of social, economic and environmental sustainability, and connected to the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (Borne 2015: 22f.). However, most of the research does not seem to refer to the potential of surfing as a sport, but more to surfing as form of tourism, which impacts the lives of many coastal communities worldwide.

In the Surfing for Social Good sector, many different actors are involved, including private people, tourists, scientists, activists, host communities, local authorities, governments, NGOs and companies. The goals and areas in Surfing for Social Good are as broad as development itself, and include poverty reduction, the protection of the oceans, as well as women’s empowerment and gender equality. In 2015, the first “Surf + Social Good” summit took place in Bali, bringing together “a diverse mix from across sectors [...] to facilitate open dialogue, debate and collaborative, creative processes for how surfing might be used as tool to connect and bring about positive impact and new ways of knowing and doing surfing.” (Britton 2017: 797)

4.3.1 Surfing and Development Organisations (SDOs)

Surfing and Development organisations are defined as non-profit or non-governmental organisations, with the aim of initiating positive change through surfing and contributing to

¹⁰ See Ponting/Borne 2015 or Borne/Ponting 2017

development goals (Britton 2015: 121). Most of the SDOs seem to be found in surf destinations in the Global South, founded by surf tourists from the Global North during or after a surf trip. The focus on development and the North-South relation distinguishes most SDOs from local surf clubs or other movements in the Surf and Social Good-sector. Nevertheless, there are also some SDOs which are situated in the Global North, particularly the ones with a focus on environmental issues. Similarly to ASDP organisations, surfing is used as a tool for development, whereas the role of the act of surfing varies. Some SDOs focus on surfing as an activity, while others consider surfing as their connecting element, but focus on other development-relevant activities, such as community empowerment or teaching English and Sustainability. There are various types of SDOs; some are very small and operate on the grassroots level, while others work at a larger scale on a “professionalized” level, such as SURF AID, which operates in isolated communities in Indonesia. SDOs are usually financed by private donations, funding from governments and international institutions or sponsoring from the surf industry. Also, the sector of development co-operation supports various Surfing and Development organisations. (Thorpe/Rhinehart 2016: 2ff) For example, the US-embassy in Indonesia sponsors a surf project for young girls in isolated communities (A Liquid Future 2016), and AUSTRALIAN AID supports a surf project for young people in Peru (Waves for Development 2016).

The area of focus of SDOs are as diverse as the Sustainable Development Goals themselves. The most common areas of action are identified as the following, though the boundaries are fluid:

- sustainability and environment
- community development and sustainable tourism
- youth empowerment
- girls and women’s empowerment
- others (peace-building, cross-cultural exchange)

The following table provides an overview of the diverse areas of action by selected SDOs. Its information is drawn from an extensive online research; there was no detailed overview like this to be found online or in literature.

Focus	Examples of selected SDOs
Sustainability and Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surfers against Sewage (UK, international) • Sustainable Surf (US, international) • Waverider Foundation (US, international) • World Surfing Reserves (US, international)
Community Development / Sustainable Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Liquid Future (Indonesia) • Beyond the Surface/Coast 2 Coast (partners in Peru, Indonesia, India) • Give and Surf (Panama) • Robertsport Community Works (Liberia) • Surfing the Nations (Hawaii, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, North Korea etc.) • Surf Aid (Indonesia) • Waves 4 Development (Peru)
Youth Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kovalam Surf Club (India) • Olas de Esperanza (Morocco, Costa Rica) • Shaka Surf Club (India) • Soul Surf (Indonesia) • Surf Grom Nation Siargao (Philippines) • Surfers not Street Children (South Africa) • Surfing Swami Foundation (India) • Waves 4 Change (South Africa)
Girls and Women's Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown Girl Surf (California) • Camp Bella by Chica Brava (Nicaragua) • Cubanita Surf (Cuba) • Girls Make Waves by Surfing the Nations (Sri Lanka) • Like Water (former Waves of Freedom) (Iran) • Pink Nose Initiative by Solwota Sister (Vanuatu) • Pink Nose Revolution by Surfing Association of Papua New Guinea • Wahine Project (California) • Watura Women's Surf Club by Rosie May Foundation (Sri Lanka)
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surfing 4 Peace (Israel / Palestine, Gaza) • Cross Culture Surf (Spain / France / UK / US / Iran)

Table 1: Overview of SDOs (Author's Own Table)

Analysing the websites of the selected SDOs shows that most of them target children and teenagers, and not adults. In addition, it becomes clear that girls and women are more restricted from participating in the SDO's programmes than boys. For example, Britton (2015) features in her article "Just Add Surf. The Power of Surfing as a Medium to Challenge and Transform Gender Equalities" five short case studies from SDOs in Iran, Liberia, Cuba, South Africa and India, highlighting that girls and women are often constrained from surfing, as they are expected to help with household duties or are not allowed to mix with boys after reaching puberty. Consequently, Britton highlights the importance of actively integrating gender (equality) into the programmes of SDOs and suggests several implications, such as to include gender analysis at all stages and sensitize staff, create safe spaces, improve access to resources, support capacity-building and work together with other women's organisations or include mentorship programmes and local role models (ibid.: 126f.). An example of how gender can be integrated into SDOs is the organisation WAVES 4 CHANGE (W4C) from South Africa, which has the following mission:

W4C provides a child-friendly mental health service to at-risk youth living in unstable communities. Through access to safe spaces, caring mentors, and a provision of weekly Surf Therapy sessions, W4C gives children skills to cope with stress, regulate behaviour, build healing relationships, and make positive life choices. (Waves for Change n.d.)

When evaluating their programme, it became clear that girls were less likely to participate in the surf lessons as they did not feel safe on their way to the surf site. By providing them with bikes and accompanying them, W4C could clearly increase the girls' participation. Whereas in 2014 only 10% of their participants were girls, the number rose to 40% in 2017 (Waves for Change 2018).

4.3.2 Surfing and Women's Empowerment

Gender can be integrated into all kind of SDOs, but there are also some initiatives that focus particularly on girls and women, like BROWN GIRL SURF in California (Brown Girl Surf n.d.) or CAMP BELLA in Nicaragua (Blaylock 2013). Most of these organisations have the goal of providing girls and women with a safe space to learn surfing. For example, the PINK NOSE REVOLUTION in Papua New Guinea (PNG), an initiative of the SURFING ASSOCIATION OF PNG, enables women to participate in surfing by enhancing their access to surf boards. As part of their strategy, they paint half of all donated surf boards in a pink colour to symbolize their exclusive ownership (Britton n.d.). Another example is the initiative LIKE WATER, which offers women in Iran workshops to learn surfing through a creative and playful approach (Britton

2017). An analysis of the websites of the selected SDOs (see table) shows that surfing is often related to women's empowerment, as the following statements illustrate:

The Wahine Project (n.d.):

[...] more time in the ocean becomes a powerful vehicle for connecting girls to their own self-empowerment as well as a way to connect communities of diverse girls to environment, ocean and with one another.

Brown Girl Surf (n.d.), "Womanifesto Song":

We play, we are community,
We are girls with the power to be who we wanna be
Respect and love to the land and sea,
We keep it fresh and express - with gratitude and peace.

Waves for Women (Girls Make Waves) (n.d.):

Women empowering women through surfing, across borders. Surfing has a unique power to bridge the gaps between race, faith, gender, sexuality and socio-economic status, because out in the waves - everyone is equal. Through surfing, women find joy, connection and are free to express themselves, just as they are. Which for many women around the world, is a rare experience in their everyday lives.

Despite the acknowledgement of the potential of surfing for empowerment, it is hardly stated how these organisations define empowerment, and how exactly surfing can contribute to it. Is it the "simple" act of wave riding? Or the connection to other development-related activities? Ruttenberg (2015), a scholar focusing on de-colonizing surf tourism, makes the critique that some SDOs tend to be unreflective with the term empowerment, making assumptions about women in the Global South without becoming familiar with their perspectives.

The Indonesian SDO A LIQUID FUTURE offers ten insights from their girls' surfing programme, why surfing is relevant for development and empowerment: 1) In Indonesia, more children and women die in tsunamis compared to men because of their lack of swimming skills. Teaching swimming and surfing can be lifesaving. 2) Surfing can bring mental and physical health benefits, and can foster discipline, confidence, self-belief, independence and a trust in themselves. 3) Surfing brings groups of girls together, through which they develop a new collective identity. Also, they gain respect from the boys and men in their communities. 4) The girls and women develop a deeper relationship with the ocean and turn into natural caretakers of it. 5) Surfing connects local girls with other surf tourists in the water, and gives them the opportunity to interact and practice their English. 6) Surfing skills can lead to employment in the surf industry as surf instructors. On top of that, female surf instructors could in turn attract more female tourists to the region. This would enable the women to learn from each other and get different insights about what it means to be a woman. It is stated that gender empowerment is seen as a critical factor for developing sustainable tourism. 7) The girls and women get the chance to become professional surfers and compete in regional or national competitions. 8)

Surfing can help to see the ocean as nothing to fear, and this positive relationship can be passed on to the next generations. 9) Empowering girls through sport is regarded as an effective investment to bring sustainable change to developing countries. And 10) Surfing is a sport with no rules and boundaries, and therefore allows freedom of expression and self-discovery. According to *A LIQUID FUTURE*, the girls, through the act of surfing, start to believe in themselves and pursue their dreams. (*A Liquid Future* 2016)

These statements of *A LIQUID FUTURE* give some initial insights into how surfing can potentially contribute to women's empowerment. They are based on the experiences of the SDO, but not on empirical studies. The only academic studies dealing explicitly with this specific topic were found from Britton, who states that at the core of her work is a focus on "understanding the impact of surfing and the sea, especially for women and girls and its potential to empower" (2017: 796). She uses "[...] a feminist conception of 'empowerment' to mean not power-over but power-to or in other words, 'the capacity to transform oneself and others' (Allen 2014: n.a.), whilst acknowledging the complexities of inherent power dynamics at play in a patriarchal and male-dominated society" (ibid.). In contrast to Britton, this thesis employs a more multi-dimensional understanding of empowerment, based on the concepts of 'power within', 'power to' and 'power with'.

Britton – herself a scholar, professional big wave surfer and activist – helped establish surf culture in Iran in 2013 with her initiative *LIKE WATER*. She states that "surfing has become a sport initiated by women and a medium to connect across gender, class, ethnic and religious divides within the country" (2017: 793). She also identifies the power of surfing for connection with others as a key factor in how surfing can contribute to empowerment, as she explains: "[Surfing] by its fluid nature, has the potential to expose participants to a more relational process in an environment that challenges dualistic notions of otherness and separateness" (ibid.: 804). In addition, she argues that surfing has the potential to challenge gender norms and to show new possibilities for women, whereas she emphasizes the importance of role models. Britton concludes that "As a tool for social good, surfing by itself does not create social change. Rather, it opens a space of possibility, a space that didn't exist before" (ibid.: 803). In a later section of this thesis, more insights from Britton's case study are discussed in comparison with the empirical results.

4.4 Summary

This chapter has shown that the history of surfing is rife with sexism and discrimination, but also studded with major accomplishments by women surfers. Recently, women from the Global South have started to become increasingly engaged in surfing, and might find ways of self-empowerment. In addition, more and more Surfing and Development Organisations provide safe spaces for girls and women in the Global South to learn surfing, initiating processes of empowerment externally. Surfing has the potential to contribute to women's empowerment in different ways than traditional sports like football, especially because of its multiple identities as an action sport, a way of life, a form of tourism, and a global industry. Its potential also stems from the fact that it takes place in the ocean, where women and men share waves next to each other. Yet the potential of surfing for women's empowerment is vastly under-explored, and the perspectives of women surfers from the Global South are largely absent from academic discourse. Consequently, further empirical research needs to be conducted.

5. Research Design

In the research design, the used methodology and methods are illustrated. Furthermore, some background information about the research field of Arugam Bay in Sri Lanka and the socio-economic backgrounds of the interviewees are provided, as well as a critical reflection of the research process and my positioning in the field.

5.1 Methodology

As women's empowerment through surfing is an unexplored field in academia, the thesis has a strong explorative character and a focus on the empirical research. The perspectives and lived realities of the women surfers from the Global South are central, which implies a qualitative and actor-oriented approach in order to grasp their personal experiences and insights (Flick et al. 2004: 3; Dannecker/Englert 2014: 9f).

As method(ology), an ethnographic research with biographical and expert interviews and participant observations was selected, which guaranteed methodological triangulation (Slezak 2014: 177; Lüders 2004: 224ff.) To get the perspectives of the women surfers, I considered it indispensable to conduct qualitative research directly in the field, at a surf region in the Global South. The focus lies on *one* surf region, as many socio-cultural factors (such as religion, class systems or the role of women in society) need to be taken in account for contextualization; hence I chose a case study as research design (Flick 2004a: 147). As a potential research field, all surf regions in the Global South with an emerging women's surf culture, such as those in Iran, Papua-New Guinea or Morocco, were conceivable.

To make the research viable, it was considered an advantage to co-operate with a Surfing and Development Organisation (SDO) or surf club, in order to have a local contact and to gain access to the women surfers more easily. After conducting extensive research on more than 40 SDOs worldwide, as well as the local conditions (such as infrastructure, language, safety, costs and surf-season), the region of Arugam Bay in Sri Lanka was identified as the most suitable research field, because women have recently started to enter the local line-ups and are encouraged by Surfing and Development Organisations. Consequently, I spent three months, from the end of July 2017 until the end of October 2017, in Arugam Bay, where I was supported by the SDO SURFING THE NATIONS (STN).

5.2 The Field

In what follows, some background information is provided about women's surfing in Sri Lanka, the SDO SURFING THE NATIONS, and their surfing programme GIRLS MAKE WAVES, as well as some general information about the current state of gender equity in Sri Lanka.

5.2.1 Women's Surfing in Sri Lanka and Arugam Bay

Sri Lanka is a multi-cultural country with about 21 million inhabitants (Worldometers n.d.), and ranks as one of the top surfing destinations in Asia. In contrast to Indonesia, where the waves are often powerful, the waves in Sri Lanka are more mellow and mainly attract beginners and intermediate surfers. In general, there are two distinct surf seasons in Sri Lanka. One occurs on the south and west coasts (including Weligama) from December to March, and the other occurs on the east coast (including Arugam Bay) from May to October (Magic Seaweed n.d.). Surf tourism in Arugam Bay started in the 1970s, when the first surf travellers from Australia arrived and introduced surfing to the local community. Since then, surfing has spread over the island. However, the civil war that lasted from 1983 to 2009, coupled with the devastating tsunami of 2004, caused prolonged lulls in Sri Lanka's tourism industry as a whole, and especially of the East Coast (McMillan 2015; Robinson/Jarvie 2008).



Figure 2. Surf Map Sri Lanka. (McMillan 2015)

Surf Tourism in Arugam Bay

The small fishing village of Arugam Bay is the surfing capital of Sri Lanka's East Coast. There are several surf spots nearby, and in Arugam Bay itself, there are two spots, the so-called 'Main Point' for intermediate to advanced surfers, and the 'Baby Point' for beginners. In general, the East Coast of Sri Lanka is predominately populated by Tamils and Muslims, which stands in contrast to the South-West, which is dominated by the Sinhalese culture. In Arugam Bay, there are Muslims (who make up the vast majority, numbering about 90%), Sinhalese (6%) and Tamils (4%) living peacefully next to each other, together with a growing community of international expats (Robinson/Jarvie 2008: 632). Similarly, the town is divided into three parts: the Sinhalese-Tamil village (which consists of a mix of Hindus, Buddhists and Christians), the Muslim part and the touristy area. No recent figures could be found about the total population of Arugam Bay, but a study about the post-disaster recovery after the tsunami suggests that in 2004, there were 1,325 families living in Arugam Bay (Robinson/Jarvie 2008: 632).

In the past, traditional fishing dominated the local economy; however, in the last few years, the tourism industry has grown rapidly and has created new jobs for the local people. The majority of tourists are surfers, mostly from Australia, Europe and Israel, but Arugam Bay also attracts local and international visitors who come for the beaches, historic temples or wildlife at nearby national parks (Robinson/Jarvie 2008: 633-639). In off-season, many locals who work in the tourism sector go back to their traditional jobs as fishermen. Efforts are being made to preserve the area while encouraging tourism. The ARUGAM BAY SURF CLUB, for example, attempts to foster *sustainable* surf tourism, with the goal to "promote surfing in Arugam Bay in professional and a safe manner, while building awareness about the need to protect our environment and marine life in Arugam Bay and in Sri Lanka." (Arugam Bay Surf Club Facebook Page n.d.)

Women's Surfing in Sri Lanka

Whereas the local men have been surfing in Arugam Bay since the 1970s, women's surfing is a recent development in Sri Lanka. Even though thousands of female surf tourists from the Global North come to Sri Lanka every year, there are only an estimated few dozens of local women surfers. Vann-Sanders (2015), a participant of the 2015 Surf + Social Good Summit in Bali and founder of the Australian SDO THE SANDSWELL MOVEMENT, articulates possible reasons as follows:

The role of women, particularly in the eastern surf capital Arugam Bay, is quite limited generally to household duties – cooking, cleaning and watching soap operas. Sport is not seen as an activity for women and the ocean is a feared place (many having lost friends, family and homes in the 2004 tsunami).

Additionally, the perpetuated stereotype of the “surfer girl” looking sexy in her bikini further isolates women from participating in surfing – not to mention the touristic surfers and sport’s infamous (although increasingly obsolete) reputation for sex, drugs and partying. Their fathers, brothers, husbands simply won’t permit their women to be a part of that, as it’s just culturally unacceptable. (Vann-Sanders 2015)

Nevertheless, the stoke has spread and Sri Lankan women are increasingly getting engaged in surfing – a development which was supported by surfing and development organisations. The year 2015 marks the “take-off” of women’s surfing in Arugam Bay, where the SDO SURFING THE NATIONS (in collaboration with THE SANDSWELL MOVEMENT) enabled more than 20 women from the Sinhalese-Tamil village to learn surfing in their first GIRLS MAKE WAVES-event. With the help of these SDOs, the girls and women had the chance to learn surfing in a safe space, while being equipped with surf material and being supervised by female surf instructors. After the first event, the women from Arugam Bay were “hooked”, and weekly surf lessons commenced (DSouza/Langeh 2016).

Apart from SURFING THE NATIONS, there are also two other SDOs operating in the southwest of Sri Lanka: In 2016, the WATURA WOMEN’S SURF CLUB (WWSC) was founded by the ROSIE MAY FOUNDATION, close to Galle. They taught local women who lived and worked with the foundation how to surf twice a month, providing them with an “empowering” and fun experience (Santosha Society 2016). However, according to email correspondence with the founder of the ROSIE MAY FOUNDATION, the project had to stop due to a lack of volunteers. Also in 2016, another surf club was founded by the Czech expat Katerina Petrouskova, THE SURF KIDS CLUB MEDDAWATTA. During the high season, they run weekly swimming and surfing classes for local children from families with poor economic backgrounds, who would otherwise not have the chance to participate in surfing due to the high equipment costs and safety risks. This is not a “girls only” surf club, but there are always girls coming to the lessons, and they make up around ¼ of participants. The programme continued in the seasons of 2017 and 2018 (Surf Kids Club Meddawatta Facebook Page n.d.).

In addition to the women who learned surfing through an SDO programme, there are also a couple of “independent” women surfers in Sri Lanka, most of whom grew up in the capital Colombo or abroad and come from a higher socio-economic background (see chapter 5.3.2). In Sri Lanka, all female surfers participate in it as a re-creational activity; there are no female competitive surfers yet.

5.2.2 Surfing the Nations and Girls Make Waves

SURFING THE NATIONS (STN) is a humanitarian organisation that was founded in Hawaii in 1997. As surf tourism often brings negative impacts to local communities in the Global South, STN wants to “give something back” to the locals. Every year, international teams travel to countries in the Global South (e.g. Bangladesh, the Philippines, Indonesia or Sri Lanka), where they participate in “selfless community service” for about a month. This community service can include different activities, such as giving surf lessons, teaching English or simply hanging out with the local kids. STN is run entirely by volunteers. (Surfing the Nations n.d.)

The first STN team came to Arugam Bay in 1998. Subsequently, they have deepened their relationship with the local community, particularly when they were helping after the tsunami. Since 2011, in Arugam Bay’s Sinhalese-Tamil village, STN has been running a permanent surf base and community centre, which is led by volunteers from the United States. In collaboration with people from the community, STN developed a weekly schedule for their activities. For example, they organise family dinners, teach English lessons, hold movie nights or give free surf lessons for the local children. In addition to their weekly schedule, they “give back” where needed: they help building houses, give financial support to people in need, or support the local surf club, for example by helping them organise surf contests. When tourists want to donate surf boards, they make sure it reaches a local child who can make good use of it. In 2015 and 2016, they also held regular GIRLS MAKE WAVES (GMW) events, in which they gave free surf lessons to the local girls and women. However, this programme has ceased being held on a regular basis. When I visited Arugam Bay in July 2017, GMW-lessons were only held occasionally, taking place twice during my three-month stay.

5.2.3 Gender Equity in Sri Lanka

For a better understanding and contextualization of the empirical data, the current situation of gender equality in Sri Lanka is briefly illustrated. Sri Lankan scholar Herath describes the situation as follows:

Despite far-reaching economic, social and political developments in Sri Lanka over the last century or so, Sri Lankan women continue to occupy a subordinate status. While women are not subjected to extreme forms of oppression, many adverse structures and forces, such as the patriarchal social structure, woman’s role in the family, traditional values, rituals and myths, the division of labour and unequal pay, and women’s lack of participation in politics contribute to the continuing subordination of Sri Lankan women. (2015: 1)

In Sri Lanka, society is based on a patriarchal system, which is reflected both in the private and the public sphere, where women are often regarded as subordinates compared to men (ibid.; Vithanage 2015; Darj et al. 2017). However, the oppression of women also differs along other categories, such as class, caste, ethnicity, sexuality or religion, and regional differences need to be considered. For example, urban women from middle-class backgrounds are more likely to be independent in decision-making than rural women from conservative families, who are usually raised to be polite and obedient (Herath 2015: 5-8).

In a recent gender assessment report from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), the situation of Sri Lankan women is described as a “relatively satisfactory position compared with women in other South Asian countries” (ADB/GIZ 2015: 1). For instance, Sri Lankan women gained the right to vote in 1931, and were given free access to state health services or education more than seven decades ago (ibid.: 7, 9). There is still a fundamental gender inequality, however, which manifests itself in a variety of ways.

In the *political sphere*, women are clearly under-represented in the national parliament, with only 5.8% of representatives being female at the general election in 2010 (ibid.: 6). This is despite the fact that Sri Lanka was the first country in the world to elect a female prime minister in 1960 (Herath 2015: 3). In terms of *economic* activities, Sri Lankan women have been participating in the labour force for centuries, though they are often not included in official labour force statistics as they tend to work at home or in informal workplaces. In 2014, the official labour force participation rate for women was 35%, compared to 76% for men (ADB/GIZ 2015: 19). Additionally, women are more likely to work in low-income sectors, such as agriculture (ibid.: vii). Nevertheless, women are also represented in highly paid professions such as medicine or tertiary education, and in some cases, they even outnumber men (Herath 2015: 11). Employed women are often confronted with the “double burden” of two jobs, as domestic chores are generally regarded as women’s duties (Herath 2015: 5).

In terms of *education*, males and females were both granted a free education shortly after Sri Lanka’s independence from Britain in 1948. The access to free state education had positive impacts on girls and women. In 1978, only 18.7% of participants in the formal education system as a whole were women. This increased to 51% by 2000. At university level specifically, women make up more than 60% of undergraduate students (Ministry of Education 2008 and

University Grants of Sri Lanka 2013, cited in Herath 2015: 9). In the national census of 2011/12, the female literacy rate was 94.6% (ADB/GIZ 2015: 19). In terms of *health status*, too, improvements have been made, with the granting of universal access to free healthcare around seven decades ago. Women have a higher life expectancy than men, at 79 years compared to 72 years (ibid.: 7).

In the *private sphere*, women in general (and particularly rural women) are often restricted in decision-making, which is considered a male domain. The average age of marriage for women is 25, and the legal age is 18 (ibid.: 2). In the Muslim community, however, girls can get legally married at the age of twelve (Abduroaf/Moosa 2016: 108). Furthermore, gender-based violence is a problem across Sri Lanka, with intimate partner violence against women estimated as being between 20% to 60% (Darj et al. 2017). In the public sphere, another study shows that more than 90% of Sri Lankan women have endured sexual harassment on public transport at least once (UNFPA 2017). And finally, in *sports*, Sri Lankan women are under-represented and undervalued compared to their male counterparts. According to Nanayakkara, women's sport is often trivialized in Sri Lanka. Although local women have won several medals at international competitions since the country's independence from Britain, only a small percentage of women actively participate in sports (2011: 153).

5.3 Methods of Data Collection

In order to collect the data and ensure triangulation, an ethnographic mixed-method approach was used (Lüders 2004: 224; Flick 2004b: 180). Over the course of three months (from the end of July to the end of October 2017), I was living in Arugam Bay, where I stayed in the touristy area and frequently visited the local community. I chose a relatively long research period of three months, as I had never been to Sri Lanka before and I was not familiar with the local culture. In retrospect it was vital to stay for at least three months, as it took me some weeks to build up trust with the organisation and the women from the community. In particular, participating in the community service of STN enabled me to gain insight into the lived realities of the local women. My role as an "independent researcher" was communicated openly to SURFING THE NATIONS and the people from the community, who knew that I was writing my thesis about "women's surfing in Sri Lanka". The methods employed were participant

observation, biographical interviews and expert interviews. In total, 21 interviews were conducted (see overview in appendix).

5.3.1 Participant Observation

Over a period of ten weeks, I participated in the community service of SURFING THE NATIONS: I regularly joined family dinners, movie nights, surf lessons, women's discussions and taught English in a nearby school in Pottuvil. This enabled me to understand the realities of the local community better and to observe gender relations and dynamics in everyday life (Lüders 2004: 222ff.) Regarding the research question, engagement in the surf lessons with the local children and the women was particularly relevant. I was an active participant myself, becoming part of the field. Every Saturday, I participated in the so-called SURF & SWIM-lessons, which were joined by around ten to twenty children, about a third of them girls between six and thirteen years old. Teaching the girls how to surf every week enabled me to observe both their progress in surfing and their emotions, and meant that I eventually became their friend. Furthermore, I joined two GIRLS MAKE WAVES-events, in which I acted as a surf instructor for the local women. In addition to the "official" community work, I spent some time independently in the community, as I became friends with some people who invited me for tea, dinner and birthday parties. Furthermore, I regularly went surfing by myself at nearby spots, which enabled me to observe gender relations "in the water". In order to ensure transparency and inter-subjective comprehensibility, I kept a research diary, which I regularly filled with field notes (Steinke 2004: 186).

5.3.2 Biographical Interviews

The perspectives of women surfers from Sri Lanka were the central part of my research. To obtain their personal experiences and stories, biographical interviews were used. Through the re-construction of their life stories and surfing careers, socio-cultural phenomena became visible (Dannecker/Vossemer 2014: 157f.). Originally, I wanted to conduct open and narrative interviews, but as my focus became clearer through prior observations, I decided to use a semi-structured approach, supported by a questionnaire. This enabled me to compare the interviews to a certain degree (ibid.: 158f.). Nevertheless, I encouraged the women to tell me their stories in terms of what *they* considered important. Consequently, each of the women discussed similar

topics, but had different areas of focus. In total, I conducted 17 biographical interviews, which lasted between one and three hours.

Socio-economic backgrounds and surf skills of the interviewees

At this stage, some background information about the interviewees is necessary, in order to understand the context and structures in which the women surfers are negotiating processes of empowerment. In the appendix, an overview of the interviewees' socio-economic backgrounds can be found. To protect their identities, pseudonyms are used. Overall, the interviewees comprised a broad mix of ages, cultures, socio-economic classes, religions, educational backgrounds and surf levels. The women were between 16 and 45 years old, and about a third of them were married and had children. To highlight intersectionality, the interviewees can be divided into two groups, classified along their different socio-economic backgrounds: the women surfers who grew up in working-class families in rural Arugam Bay and participated in the GMW-events (n=14), and the women surfers who grew up in middle-class families in Colombo or the Global North, and took up surfing independently (n=4).

Women from the Sinhalese-Tamil community in Arugam Bay

All women of this group (apart from one) were born and raised in the Sinhalese-Tamil community of Arugam Bay, where they grew up with fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins or husbands heavily involved in surfing. All women surfers had a Sinhalese or Tamil background; at time of research, I did not hear about any female surfers who belonged to the Muslim community in Arugam Bay or the wider area. This means that the women surfers formed a minority group within an area dominated by Muslim culture. All interviewees spoke either Tamil, Sinhala, or both, and some of them spoke (broken) English too. The majority of the women were Christians while three were Buddhists; religion and faith played an important role in their lives.

At time of research, all women, apart from one who had emigrated to Australia, lived in the Sinhalese-Tamil community, where they emphasized that they felt themselves to be “more free” than the Muslim women in the area. However, many women reported that they were restricted in making their own decisions, usually being expected to listen to their families or husbands. Most women came from working-class families, with their fathers or husbands engaged in the fishing or tourism sector (as fishermen, surf instructors, tuk-tuk¹¹ drivers, shop owners or

¹¹ A tuk-tuk is an auto rickshaw, a common three-wheel transportation vehicle in Sri Lanka.

chefs). Many families also rented out rooms on their properties to tourists, which provided them with a small income. All women went to school, but some dropped out early and none of them went to university.

The interviewees can be further divided into the “unmarried women” (n= 7), who usually lived in their family’s houses, and the “married women” (n=6), who lived together with their husbands and children, being responsible for domestic chores and childcare. Some of them had smaller extra jobs in their homes, such as doing laundry or running a small restaurant. One woman was a widow and mother in her late thirties, who made her own income as a massage therapist. The unmarried women, with the exception of one 16-year-old girl who still went to school, all worked in the tourism sector during season-time, as shop assistants, nannies, tailors or cleaners. They reported that during the off-season they were usually unemployed. Most of the women originally learned surfing with the GIRLS MAKE WAVES programme of STN in 2015.

Urban women from middle-class

The other four interviewees had more diverse backgrounds. They were all born in different parts of Sri Lanka, but most of them grew up abroad in Italy, Kuwait or Norway. One woman grew up in Colombo, but had subsequently experienced long stays abroad in England and South Asia. They also had different ethnic backgrounds: two were Sinhalese, one was Tamil, and one was half-Swedish and half-Muslim Sri Lankan. Thus, they also grew up with different religions (Buddhism, Islam and Christianity), and on the whole religion played a minor role in their current lives. The women were all from middle-class families and were well-educated. They all spoke fluent English and most of them had a university degree. None of the women, who were between 19 and 32 years old, were married, but two had a Sri Lankan boyfriend. At the time of research, three women lived in Arugam Bay, and one lived in Weligama; all of them worked in the tourism or creative sectors. All women learned surfing independently, without the help of an SDO. In the beginning, they usually took surf lessons, and eventually started to surf alone or with friends. This demonstrates the importance of considering intersectionality, as it makes it clear that surfing is more accessible for women from a higher socio-economic background.

Surf skills of the women

The women can also be classified according to their surf skills by being divided into four groups: the absolute beginners (n=3), better beginners (n=7), intermediate surfers (n=4) and non-active surfers (n=4). Three of the women were absolute beginners, as they had tried surfing

a maximum of three times. They knew how to paddle, but they could not yet stand up. The unmarried women from Arugam Bay were all better beginners; they had all surfed around 30 times over the course of two or three years. They felt comfortable in the water, knew how to paddle and could catch waves and stand up. Some of them could also ride green waves¹² to the side. However, they could not catch waves by themselves. In the village of Arugam Bay, only one local woman was an intermediate surfer. She was able to catch her own waves, riding up to head-high green waves. The urban women (apart from one who started in 2017) can all be classified as intermediate surfers too, as they were capable of catching their own waves. In addition, I interviewed four women who were no longer active surfers. Two of the interviewees were probably among the first female surfers in Sri Lanka, starting out as young children in the 1980s. However, they were forced to stop after they reached puberty. The other two participated in the GMW-events in 2015, but at time of research, they were forbidden from surfing by their families.

The setting

The interviews generally lasted around two hours, and most took place in the homes of the women. A few interviews were also conducted in public places, like a restaurant, café or at the beach. Most interviews were conducted without the presence of any third party besides a translator, though occasionally a female neighbour or friend came by. There was never a man present during any of the interviews, which seemed a crucial prerequisite for the women to speak openly. As I did not speak any Tamil or Sinhala, the interviews were held in English, often with the help of a translator. In total, I worked with three translators. Two of them were women surfers from Arugam Bay, whose English skills were good enough to have a meaningful conversation. They had both learned English by themselves, helped by the fact that they grew up in touristy areas. The third translator was a young woman with a Tamil background, who grew up in Norway. She helped me conduct interviews with the younger, unmarried women from the village. It was greatly beneficial that she did not grow up in the community, because it provided these interviewees with a safe space to speak about more sensitive topics.

The topics

The interviews were semi-structured, and consisted of two parts. The first was about surfing in particular, and the second was about the women's lives more generally. In the very beginning, I asked the women to introduce themselves and tell the story of how they started surfing.

¹² Green waves are *unbroken* waves. Usually beginners start surfing broken waves (“white water”).

Follow-up questions about surfing included, for example, “How do you feel when you are surfing?” and “What has changed in your life since you have started surfing?” The questions concerning their life as women in Sri Lanka were kept more open; topics included whether or not they enjoy living in Arugam Bay, how they make decisions, and their perceptions of women’s empowerment and gender equality. Even though I had prepared some questions, the interviews were flexible and sometimes the girls and women brought up new topics.

5.3.3 Expert Interviews

Additionally, I conducted four expert interviews with representatives of SDOs and surf clubs. Expert interviews are not a distinct type of interview, but are rather defined over the status of knowledge that the interviewees embody (Dannecker/Vossemer 2014: 161). In this case, the interviewees had specific knowledge about surfing and development programmes in the Global South. The term “expert” is employed critically though, considering post-colonial critique on the hierarchies of knowledge production in a North-South context (ibid.). In contrast to the women surfers, the experts do not remain anonymous in this thesis, because they are “official” representatives of their organisations:

- Lizzie Murray: Founder of A LIQUID FUTURE in Indonesia
- Tiffany Carothers: Founder of the GIRLS MAKE WAVES-events (STN) in Sri Lanka
- Katerina Petrouskova: Founder of the SURF KIDS CLUB MEDDAWATTA in Sri Lanka
- Krishanta Ariyasena: President of the ARUGAM BAY SURF CLUB in Sri Lanka

Before flying to Sri Lanka, I conducted a skype interview with Lizzie Murray from A LIQUID FUTURE in Indonesia, where she runs a surfing programme for local children, including girls. Her experiences gave me important insights before commencing with field research. In the following analysis, her insights from Indonesia are occasionally compared to the perspectives of the women surfers from Sri Lanka. The other three experts were all interviewed personally in Sri Lanka, using a semi-structured approach supported by a questionnaire.

5.4 Access and Sampling

I found out about the “women’s surfing movement” in Sri Lanka from online articles in surf magazines, which report a “switch of the gender imbalance on the surf at Arugam Bay” (DSouza/Langeh 2016). Consequently, I contacted SURFING THE NATIONS via email, asking them if I could participate in their surfing programme and community work while conducting research. Having been offered their support, I decided to conduct my empirical research in Arugam Bay.

Thus, the sampling was pre-determined; I came to Sri Lanka with the idea of interviewing female local surfers, and already knew that there existed a community of women surfers living in Arugam Bay. SURFING THE NATIONS assisted me vastly in gaining access to the surfer women; however, it turned out that the situation on the ground was more complex and fragile than I had expected. Before coming to Arugam Bay, I had assumed that I would participate in weekly GIRLS MAKE WAVES surf lessons. When I arrived, however, I found out that the lessons no longer took place regularly, due to the resistance of some local leaders to women’s surfing. Consequently, it took me longer than expected to establish contacts and build up relationships with the women surfers.

At time of research, most women from Arugam Bay had stopped surfing temporarily. They were still very motivated, but without the help of more experienced surfers, they were not allowed to surf by their families. Thus, I decided to first build up trust and relationships by joining the surf lessons for children, which were held weekly, and participating in community service. After some weeks, my relationships with the people from the community had deepened, and even though I did not surf with the adult women surfers for the first two months, our shared passion for surfing connected us. Therefore, I asked them if they were interested in participating in an “official” interview with me and a translator, but they were shy and reluctant in the beginning. For some time, it seemed that my research was at a standstill.

Consequently, I adapted my sampling and decided to include “independent” women surfers from other parts of Sri Lanka too. In general, there are not many female surfers from Sri Lanka, but I was able to track down four women by asking people from the surf scene and by posting a request in two Facebook groups used by the surf communities in Sri Lanka¹³. Some people

¹³ Facebook groups: Arugam Bay Surf Community and South Sri Lanka Surf Community

wrote back that there were no women surfers from Sri Lanka at all, but I finally received some leads that took me to the four women surfers introduced in chapter 5.3.2. As one woman was staying in Weligama, I contacted her via Facebook, and she was willing to give me an interview straight away. As a result I visited the south coast for several days, combining the trip with a visit to Katerina Petrouskova from the SURF KIDS CLUB MEDDAWATTA.

By the end of September, the standstill in Arugam Bay dissolved when Tiffany Carothers returned to Sri Lanka. Within a week of her return, two GIRLS MAKE WAVES events were organised, in which I participated actively as a surf instructor. In total, we were a team of seven international female surf instructors, who took nine local women surfing. The role of a surf instructor was to help the women position themselves on the board and to push them into the waves. This was the first time I had the chance to see them in the water myself. The women were very happy about going surfing again, and the shared experiences in the water bonded us. After the surf lessons, all women were very motivated to give me an interview, and some could hardly wait to tell me their stories. Moreover, they invited me to their homes for an interview, and they also recommended a few additional surf-interested women who had not participated in the GMW-events. In the following two weeks, I interviewed 13 women from the village. As the interviews all happened in the last two weeks of my stay, I was not able to transcribe or analyse them directly.

5.5 Method of Data Analysis

Back in Austria, all interviews were transcribed with the help of the transcribing software F4. Most interviews were fully transcribed; the ones which included longer digressions were only partly transcribed. Transcribing turned out to be an intensive process, with about 40 hours of audio recordings requiring transcription. As some interviewees spoke in broken English, I decided to transcribe word-for-word in order not to change the original meaning. However, when quoting the women, I corrected very small grammatical mistakes. I am aware that I interpreted their statements on my own behalf.

After the transcribing process, the interviews were analysed by coding them in an inductive as well as a deductive manner. The analysis was oriented at the summarizing content analysis of Philipp Mayring, which “seeks to reduce the material in such a way that the essential contents

are preserved” (2004: 268). First, I coded every interview openly, creating a biography of each woman. Through the individual biographies, similarities became more obvious, which were consequently formed into first categories. For the next step, the transcripts were coded deductively again, regarding the research question and the theoretical framework of women’s empowerment. Subsequently, the main categories, including sub-categories, were developed. This open process allowed me to develop categories, which were not determined beforehand, but crystallized throughout the coding process. The coding process was assisted through use of the software F5.

5.6 Reflection

5.6.1 Difficulties in the Research Process

Ethical questions

In the beginning, I was very surprised that I did not see any local surfer women in the water. Slowly I realized that women’s surfing was perceived as a sensitive and controversial topic, and that not everyone in Arugam Bay was pleased about Sri Lankan women entering the local surf spots. Coming as an “outsider” and researcher into a small community, I first had to gain the trust of the local people and STN, and further familiarize myself with local habits. As the organisation and community got to know me better, I perceived that the situation had relaxed, and I turned more into an “insider”. Subsequently, my status as “insider” and “outsider” was constantly negotiated (Englert/Dannecker 2014: 246). In the interviews, most women surfers talked openly and proudly to me about their experiences. But as women’s surfing was discussed controversially in the community, I decided to use pseudonyms in this thesis, in order to protect the women’s identities. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that many of the women would have been happy for their real names to be used.

Language barriers and critical reflection of the interviews

The interviews must be reflected critically. First, there was a clear language barrier between me and many of the interviewees, particularly the women from Arugam Bay. I cannot exclude the possibility of misunderstandings or misinterpretations from my side, from the translators, or from the interviewees. In general, the interviews with the women from a higher socio-economic class were perceived as “easier”, as they were fluent in English and could express themselves

very well. I did about half of the interviews with the women from Arugam Bay with a translator, which worked quite well. Nevertheless, two of the translators spoke “Sri Lankan English”, in which they often flipped the word order, which sometimes made it hard for me to understand the true meaning during the interview or when transcribing it. Unfortunately, some statements got lost in translation. Nevertheless, the translators were a great support, and allowed me to gain far more insights than I did from the interviews with no translator. However, it was not possible to do every interview with a translator due to their lack of availability. In addition to the language barrier, it must be taken into account that reputation is very important in Sri Lanka, and some answers might have been given due to social desirability (Dannecker/Vossemer 2014: 168). For example, some interviewees might have avoided sensitive topics in order to protect themselves or their families.

5.6.2 My Standpoint in the Field

Furthermore, my multi-dimensional role as a researcher from the Global North, a surfer, and a friend of the interviewees, needs to be reflected critically (Englert/Dannecker 2014: 242ff.). The goal of my thesis is to include the absent voices of women surfers from the Global South into the academic discourse. In this case, I am aware that I am a privileged woman from the Global North, who is doing research about “other” women from the Global South. I am aware that I embody a certain socio-economic status and that I am in the position to interpret the women’s experiences, embed it within a theoretical framework and present it to an academic audience. To overcome these hierarchies and avoid Othering-processes, I constantly try to reflect upon my own position, considering insights from feminist and post-colonial scholars, such as Spivak (Can the subaltern speak? 1988) or Mohanty (Under Western Eyes, 1984). Even though I do not directly refer to their post-colonial theories in the thesis, I always attempted to keep them in the back of my mind, challenging my own eurocentrism.

When doing field research, the role as researcher is determined by power structures, whereas researchers from the Global North tend to hold a high authority by the “subjects” from the Global South (Englert/Dannecker 2014: 244). In this regard, I hardly had the feeling that my socio-cultural background or my “whiteness” created a gap between us. I posit that being a *female surfer* myself has allowed me to connect to the interviewees on the same level. Or as a young woman from Arugam Bay put it: “You and me are the same, I think. You are my friend. We both like surfing.” Through sharing the same passion, interests and womanhood, we were

able to bond, and hierarchies mostly dissolved. For example, many women also asked me questions about my personal surf stories during the interviews. Nevertheless, I must reflect that we grew up in very different realities. Even though I spent three months in Arugam Bay, I must emphasize that I had no prior familiarity with the local culture, and I could understand the women's realities only to a certain degree. Nonetheless, I constantly tried to challenge my Western perspectives through critical self-reflection, but I cannot guarantee that I did not misinterpret certain phenomena. I also want to emphasize that I myself learned a lot from the women, and the conversations with them also made me feel "empowered", by challenging and enriching my own perspectives on what it means to be a woman.

In addition, I must be careful to keep a critical distance in order to avoid a biased view of surfing. As a surfer myself, I experienced many positive changes that came into my life through the sport. However, I acknowledge that surfing is not the same for everyone, that it is not a panacea, and that it can also have negative consequences. In what follows, I do my best to overcome any bias, and to allow the stories of the women surfers to speak for themselves.

6. Women's Empowerment through Surfing

In this chapter, the empirical insights are discussed along the research question: How can surfing contribute to women's empowerment, according to the perspectives of women surfers from Sri Lanka? In the following, the personal experiences of the female surfers from Sri Lanka are embedded into the theoretical framework of women's empowerment, while drawing upon previous studies on gender, sport, surfing and Sport for Development for comparative analysis. In addition, it is attempted to examine the unique features of surfing that distinguish it from other sports.

As already highlighted in the theoretical part, women's empowerment is a multi-dimensional process that incorporates 'power from within', 'power to', 'power with' and 'power over' (Rowlands 1997). For contextualizing the perspectives of the women surfers from Sri Lanka, the theoretical model which was developed in chapter 2.6 is used as a framework, including the personal, relational, collective and community level. Whereas on the first three levels mostly changes on a psychological level are discussed, on the community level socio-cultural and economic impacts are illustrated. Nevertheless, the different levels can also overlap with each other – in practice, a separation does not always exist.

6.1 Personal Level

In literature, women's empowerment on the personal level refers to a psychological change of the individual, by developing self-esteem, self-confidence, a sense of agency, a sense of 'self' in a wider context, dignity, self-efficacy or psychological well-being (Rowlands 1997: 11-15, 112; Maholtra et al. 2002: 13). All interviewees report several positive changes in their lives since they have started surfing, which are closely intertwined with the theoretical concept of personal empowerment. For example, many women became more self-confident through surfing. As Dayani, a young woman from Arugam Bay, points out: "Before, I was so afraid. When I started surfing, I learned things which made me so afraid, like standing on a board or paddling. This makes me more confident. This makes me less afraid from things." (Interview 17) In what follows, some of these psychological changes are examined in more detail, with particular emphasis on how surfing contributes to these changes.

6.1.1 Expanding Horizons of Possibility

According to feminist authors, women's empowerment starts with a "shift of consciousness", where women re-shape their imagination of what is possible for them to be and do (Rowlands 1997; Cornwall/Edwards 2014). In this regard, it is argued that surfing has the potential to re-define women's horizons of possibility and increase their self-confidence, through achieving something they never thought possible.

The majority of the interviewees report, that before they tried surfing for the first time, they did not think that they were capable of doing such a "difficult" or "tough" sport. Surfing happens in the ocean, a place that is often feared in Sri Lanka. As Sanduni, a surfer living in Weligama, points out: "Most Sri Lankan parents tell their kids to stay away from the sea. Because they never see anything good from being in the ocean. Like ocean equals death to Sri Lankan parents." (Interview 4) This internalized fear also stems from the tsunami that hit Sri Lanka on the 26th of December 2004 and killed more than 31,000 people in the country (Nobuyuki et al. 2006: 1). Also Arugam Bay was struck hard by the tsunami, and many interviewees emphasize that they were deeply traumatized afterwards.

Surfing is a very uncommon sport for local women in Sri Lanka – and many interviewees report that, without external intervention, they could not have imagined participating in the sport. This equally refers to the women from working-class families in Arugam Bay as well as the urban women from a higher socio-economic class. For instance, Mandari from Colombo is one of the pioneering female surfers in her country, making her first surf attempts back in 2003. Even though she has always been "obsessed with the ocean" (Interview 7), surfing seemed to be something difficult to achieve for her, as she points out:

Even to me, until my friend introduced it to me. I would not have ever even thought that I was capable of doing something like that [surfing]. For one, it looks really tough. And then, when you try it on your own [...], it is hard. Like if you are drowning or you know (laughing). You'd feel like you can't do it. [...] I mean, I am just talking in my name now – I feel like with, say for example, running. Everyone can run, you can just run from here to there. [...] Or cricket, like you have seen everyone doing it for your whole life. [...] Like you play with your brothers or whatever. Whereas surfing I feel like, maybe it is one of those things where you feel like you just can't do it. [...] And I feel like a lot, in Sri Lanka, unless someone introduces it to you, it is not like the normal thing. It is not like something you would consider as an option, like 'Oh I can do this', like a job or a sport or whatever. (Mandari, Interview 7)

Like Mandari, all interviewees were encouraged to try surfing by family members, friends or an SDO like SURFING THE NATIONS, who provided them a safe space to learn. Many women report that they were very nervous and afraid before they tried surfing for the first time.

However, once they tried surfing, they all managed to overcome their fears. Surfing made them feel good about themselves, and the “stoke” transformed their fear into a feeling of being happy, proud and confident. All women managed to do something they never thought they could do, such as paddling out into the ocean or standing up on a surf board. As Asheni articulates:

You learn something. You become more at ease in that space. [...] And it's challenging. It's getting out of your comfort zone and doing something you never thought you could do. I never thought of being out there so far in the water. (Asheni, Interview 2)

The women's experiences are clearly relatable to the theoretical concept of empowerment by Cornwall and Edwards (2014: 16): “Empowerment is not just about enlarging the boundaries of action. It is also about expanding horizons of possibility, of what people imagine themselves being able to be and do.” This realization also pushed the women's trust in themselves, and made them feel like they can achieve anything they want. For example, Dayani, who was very scared of the ocean after the tsunami, points out: “After I started surfing, I started to believe in myself.” (Interview 17) Likewise, Susanthika states: “Yeah, I got self-confident that I can do whatever [I want]. I can achieve everything in my life.” (Interview 10) Similar observations are recorded in Cornwall in England, where the organisation THE WAVE PROJECT offers surf lessons as therapy for young people with mental health issues. Many of the participants report an increase in their self-confidence, as “they felt they had overcome a challenge, and had surprised themselves by discovering they could do something that they did not believe they could do (standing up on a surf board or catching a wave)” (Taylor 2013: 84). Mandari thinks that the increase in self-confidence stems from the energy one gets from surfing. As she points out:

I think it is just a confidence-boost for everyone. It is like riding a motorbike really fast or playing an electric guitar (laughing). It is just one of the best feeling in life, no? And I feel like, how can you not be confident after that. You just get that rush. (Mandari, Interview 7)

In general, the potential of sport for improving self-confidence is illustrated in several studies in the Sport for Development-discourse, mostly relating to team sports (see UN Women 2007, Jeanes/Magee 2014). What differentiates surfing, and other action sports such as skating, climbing or parkour, from most team sports is that it is less competitive. Action sports offer “opportunities for children and youth to gain a sense of achievement without having to compete against, and beat another team or player. Rather, participants can learn alongside one another and gain a sense of accomplishment based on their own skill development” (ASDP n.d.). Similarly, the women surfers from Arugam Bay gained self-confidence through skills mastery. All women, also the beginners, proudly report about their achievements in surfing. For example,

Bandhini points out that she feels like “a good girl” when she stands up on her surf board (Interview 19). Or as Aysha puts it:

[...] when you catch the wave, it is a win for me. That's how I see that. When I can catch a wave and you know, stand until the wave is finished, until the end, then I feel like, ‘Oh cool, I made it!’ Then it feels so good! So I had [that] very few times, but I was so happy that I could stand and feel it. Just standing in the water and feeling like the world is looking around and just feeling like something is pushing you, you know. So it feels good for me! (Aysha, Interview 11)

Another feature of surfing which can contribute to an increase in self-confidence and trust in oneself, is that it is an individual sport, where the women need to rely on themselves. Lizzie Murray from A LIQUID FUTURE in Indonesia notes that surfing entails an element of danger. She compares the ocean to a tennis court, where probably no one would be scared to step onto. In addition, on the tennis court, there are rules and structures, whereas in the ocean, the women are free from formal rules. Murray states that for many Indonesian surfer girls it is like, “Wow, I have complete freedom. I can do whatever I want. But to be able to do that, I gotta trust myself. [...] I can look after myself in this incredibly powerful element that I was frightened of before” (Murray, Interview 1). This feeling might contribute to a higher increase in self-confidence and trust than a team sport, as Mandari highlights:

Like it [surfing] makes you feel confident, it makes you feel bad-ass (laughing). Cause if you are doing netball or a team sport, like cricket or something – yeah it makes you feel good. But I don't feel like it gives you that individual kind of strength. In a sense. Whereas when surfing, you are on your own, with your board – it is just you and the sea. And I feel like that this gives you a sense of like power. Like for me personally I really feel like that. (Mandari, Interview 7)

Thus, surfing empowers the women on an individual level as they achieve something by themselves. However, this stands in contrast to the beginner surfers from Arugam Bay, who were not able to catch their own waves yet and who were dependent on the help of more advanced surfers. Without assistance in the water, they would not have felt comfortable. Nevertheless, the better the women get at surfing, the more their confidence and trust in themselves grows. This growth in confidence was also observed when participating in the SURF & SWIM lessons from STN. During the three months period of research, two young girls (10 and 13 years old) improved their surf skills so much that they tried to surf a more advanced spot. The first time we were paddling there together, the girls were very nervous. But after catching their first waves, their fear transformed into confidence – and in the end, they did not want to stop catching waves.

Consequently, the women also bring their newly gained self-confidence back to the shore, as Shehara points out: “When I am surfing in a good way, then afterwards I am thinking, I can do

everything.” (Interview 8) Back on land, many interviewees are confronted with several obstacles. For example, some local people do not like that Sri Lankan women are getting more and more engaged in surfing and try to make them feel small, such as by making mean or nasty comments to them. However, many women report that they developed a confidence to speak up for themselves. As Susanthika states: “[Surfing] gives me self-confidence. I am not afraid to come out and face the challenges.” (Interview 10) This process was also observed by Tiffany Carothers from STN over the years:

And I think that’s confidence that they are finding who they are and something that they like and nobody is gonna hold them back on that. Even when comments are made to them, I can tell, they are definitely more confident to stand up to men that tear them down about being a woman and they shouldn’t be able to surf and they stand up for themselves. (Carothers, Interview 16)

Furthermore, it is argued that surfing can also contribute to an expansion of the women’s imagination and view of the world as surfing happens in the public sphere and exposes the girls and women to other people and their reactions. In Sri Lanka, girls and women from rural areas are usually prevented from interaction with society, as Herath (2015: 6) states: “While a boy enjoys a care-free upbringing, a girl is carefully attended, and a mature girl is always shielded from interaction with the society around her and may miss many opportunities.” This also counts for the interviewees from working-class families from Arugam Bay, who do not regularly take part in public life and are usually supposed to stay at home. When they go surfing, they enter the public space, and through the reactions of other people they can learn more about themselves and others. Particularly Susanthika highlights that surfing enabled her to see the world in a different light than before:

Yeah, it [surfing] changed that I can see the world in a different way and I can feel what is going on around me [...]. And I can feel like something is different than what I have seen. [...] Before, my life was only about being at home. Now it is like, because of surfing and I started working, I can start to see the world in a different way. And I can see how people are, how they judge, how they talk, how good they can be, how bad they can be. Like I can learn about people, I can learn about different things. (Susanthika, Interview 10)

Developing this “sense of ‘self’ in a wider context” is another key indicator for women’s empowerment on the personal level (Rowlands 1997: 112). However, Susanthika highlights that this development was not only evoked through surfing, but also because she started working around the same time (Interview 10). To summarize: surfing can expand the women’s horizons of possibility, strengthen their trust in themselves and increase their self-confidence. This growth of ‘power from within’ (Rowlands 1997: 13) results from mastering a difficult activity the women thought unable to do before, from overcoming their internalized fears as well as from entering the public space and learning from and about others.

6.1.2 From Fear to Love

As just mentioned, surfing can help the women to overcome their fear of the ocean. In the following, this argument is examined in more detail, as it was a very important topic for all interviewees, and it is closely intertwined with individual empowerment. Almost all women report that before they started surfing, they were afraid of the waves – and that through surfing, they managed to overcome their fear. This shift might result from the women experiencing “pure joy” in the water, and slowly feeling more comfortable in an element they were afraid of before. On top of that, through surfing, all interviewees deepened their relationship with the ocean, often transforming it from a fearful to a loving one. This potential is also highlighted by the SDO A LIQUID FUTURE, which states that surfing can enable a love for the ocean and “teaches about the ocean environment and how to preserve and be a caretaker of it” (A Liquid Future 2016). Especially the intermediate surfers highlight that being in touch with nature is an essential part of surfing, where they connect to the ocean on a “higher level”. As Sanduni articulates:

Actually, I posted this picture on Instagram and the caption of the picture is ‘Only a surfer knows.’ And I didn't explain like what it is, but I felt like only a surfer knows how it feels like to be in the ocean. Just everything (laughing). Only a surfer would know. I feel like other people wouldn't really know what the ocean feels like really. I mean, it's one thing to swim in the ocean. But, I mean, [...] you can't go quite far out. When you are a surfer and you are on your board, you feel more at home. Like you are part of the ocean. (Sanduni, Interview 4)

What is remarkable, is that this transformation also applies to women who were traumatized by the tsunami from 2004. All interviewees from Arugam Bay experienced the tsunami themselves, and many lost family members, friends and homes. In Arugam Bay, more than 200 people from 1,325 families were killed and more than 500 houses were destroyed (Robinson/Jarvie 2008: 632). Some interviewees were so traumatized, that they did not go close to the ocean for years. However, as time passed, the interviewees slowly started to feel more comfortable about the ocean again – and surfing seems to have played a major role in that process. As Minrada, who was 17 years old when she lost her mother to the tsunami, articulates:

Surfing makes me forget the tsunami. Now, I want to have fun. Before, I was sad about the ocean. Now I want to learn more. I want to surf more. Then I also forget my other things [worries] a little bit. Now my energy is coming like, I want to learn [...] I want to stand up. I want to catch my own wave. (Minrada, Interview 13)

Minrada's story might be exemplary for the “healing power” of the ocean, which is examined in more detail in chapter 6.1.3. Overall, the women surfers' experiences are linked to individual empowerment, as they can see themselves in a wider context, re-connecting to their natural

environment (Rowlands 1997: 112). Furthermore, in the interviews it became obvious that for most women surfers, fear is a prevalent part of surfing. For them, excitement and fear often lie close to each other. As Nimali states: “I am happy and at the same time afraid. I am afraid that I will fall down and hit myself. And happy to look forward to catching a wave and riding on the wave.” (Interview 18) All women surfers report that they feel scared sometimes, mostly when the waves are big or when they are stuck in the “washing machine”¹⁴. Nevertheless, none of the women wants to stop surfing, because they are afraid sometimes. For them, being scared is “part of the game” and by gaining more experience, they also learn how to cope better with their fears. As Asheni highlights:

I was really scared of the ocean at the beginning. Like when I was going surfing the first times, every time I saw a big wave, I was like not even trying to catch it. [...] And obviously then you start falling and [...] at the beginning you panic a lot. And then you kind of know how to do it, you just relax and go with the flow and then it's less frightening now. (Asheni, Interview 2)

Consequently, the women also learned how to deal with other fears back on land. As Sanduni points out:

Actually, surfing made me lose my fear of a lot of things. Like I would be so scared about what people think of me and when I am surfing, I used to surf to look cool in front of others. But now, I surf for myself and I try out new things, like just anything. [...] And that's something that affects my life as well, like my day to day life. Like I would try new things. (Sanduni, Interview 4)

Hence, the women surfers' experiences seem to be connected to developing a ‘power to’ and ‘power from within’, which enables them to become aware of their own interests and to have the courage to try new things (Eyben et al. 2008: 5). However, their agency depends on the structures they find themselves in, which is explored in more detail in chapter 6.1.4.

6.1.3 ‘Blue Space’ and Well-being

According to Maholtra et al. (2002: 13), psychological well-being is another indicator for women’s empowerment on the personal level. In this regard, surfing seems to have many positive effects on the women surfers from Sri Lanka, such as the just mentioned “healing” potential of surfing. All interviewees report that surfing makes them happier and feel good about themselves. They describe surfing as an amazing, exciting and fun experience that brings a lot of joy into their lives. Similarly, Bush (2016) conducted a study about the experiences of

¹⁴ In surf slang, being in the “washing machine” refers to the situation when a surfer is being held down underwater by a wave.

female surfers from the US East coast and concludes that for them, “surfing is pure joy”. She connects the experiences of the women surfers to a “sense of empowerment and strength [that] took on several forms, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual” (Bush 2016: 299).

Even though many women surfers from Sri Lanka do not have the possibility to go surfing regularly, surfing plays an important role in their lives and for their well-being. For example, two young women mention that if they did not have surfing in their lives anymore, it would affect them mentally and they would feel depressive. For them, surfing is a hobby and a change in their daily routines, something to look forward to. On land, especially the women who grew up in working-class families in Arugam Bay have many responsibilities in the household, and surfing offers them a break from their duties. Consequently, all interviewees report that they forget about their problems when they are surfing. In the water, they only focus on catching waves and learn to enjoy the present moment. Particularly the intermediate surfers describe the feeling of the “flow” and compare surfing to meditation, where their “mind goes blank”. As Asheni puts it:

It’s probably the best sport in the world. It’s so calming, and at the same time, it is so thrilling. It is ups and downs. It’s a good sport to get out of everything. It’s also a bit meditative. You’re just focused on that. It’s like you step out of the world, like you are in the ocean and you are just out of it. Out of all the problems. (Asheni, Interview 2)

Many interviewees also report that they feel better and more relaxed *after* surfing, back on land. As Shehara states: “After surfing, I feel SO good. It is like everything is okay for me.” (Interview 8) The positive impacts of surfing on mental well-being is also confirmed in a number of other studies. For example, THE WAVE PROJECT measured an overall increase in their participants’ self-esteem, self-confidence and well-being through the programme (Taylor 2013: 82). Or in another study about the social values of surfing for a coastal community in Victoria, Australia, 95% of the respondents stated that surfing was extremely important for their happiness and well-being (Suendermann 2015: 3). Similarly, the SDO WAVES FOR CHANGE in South Africa evaluated their surfing programme for disadvantaged youth and concluded that 97% of the children felt happier than before. Surfing clearly improved their mental well-being, particularly through learning skills how to cope with stress (Waves for Change 2018).

As already highlighted in Minrada’s tsunami story, surfing also seems to have a “healing” effect. In Arugam Bay, many interviewees who have experienced personal strokes of fate, such as the loss of family members or gender-based violence, report that when they are surfing, the water washes away their worries. As Nuveena, a surfing widow in her late thirties, puts it:

When I go surfing, I am forgetting everything and it is relaxing for my heart. It is a good time for me. Because I have many problems in my mind – but when I am surfing, I forget everything in this moment. (Nuveena, Interview 20)

The therapeutic potential of surfing is also attested in other studies. For example, Bush (2016: 299ff.) states that women surfers from the US East coast use surfing as a medium to cope with emotional pain and traumatic experiences, such as cancer or divorce, and regarded surfing as “healing”, “therapy” or “gift”. According to Taylor (2013: 85), “there is something about the sensory experience of being in the sea, combined with the emotional boost they get from overcoming a challenge, that helps young people feel better about themselves.” Similarly, Britton (2017: 800) highlights the “sensuous, therapeutic or healing qualities of the sea”, which are integrated into her surfing programme LIKE WATER, and relates it to the emerging research field of ‘blue space’ (see Depledge/Bird 2009; White et al. 2010). Blue space can be defined as “health-enabling places and spaces, where water is at the centre of a range of environments with identifiable potential for the promotion of human wellbeing” (Foley/Kistemann 2015: 157; cited in Britton 2017: 800). In addition, Thorpe (2015c) conducted one of the first studies about the potential of action sports for post-disaster recovery, doing a case study in Christchurch in New Zealand after the earthquake in 2011. She concluded that action sports, such as surfing, skateboarding or climbing, helped participants to deal with stress and the beaches or skate parks became their “therapeutic landscapes”.

In addition, THE WAVE PROJECT from Cornwall illustrates that their participants “liked feeling free and being unbounded by rules” (Taylor 2013: 84). Similarly, many of the women surfers from Sri Lanka emphasize that surfing makes them feel free, like “flying like a bird” or “being in a different world”. For example, one young woman mentions that sometimes she feels sad or angry, because her participation in public space is limited due to cultural norms, but when she is surfing, “It’s like flying out of a closed box”. Some other women feel reminded of their childhood when surfing, referring to a time when they were playing carelessly at the beaches. For example, the sisters Gayesha and Rangani mention that surfing makes them feel like little children again (Interview 14). Likewise, Lizzie Murray from A LIQUID FUTURE thinks that surfing is liberating for the girls in her programme “because it is playful, it is creative, there are no rules, no rights or wrong, you can express yourself how you want and you are not told what to do.” (Murray, Interview 1) Sanduni suggests that surfing could provide Sri Lankan women a way to escape the pressure of living up to expectations from society for a while:

I feel like Sri Lankan women need something like surfing. [...] If they had surfing, it's kind of a break for them from their life and how they live. And if they have surfing, I feel like [...] they could be in their own bubble, not care what other people think. And they need that, they really do. Sort of like therapy. (Sanduni, Interview 4)

Similarly, Britton (2015: 125) argues that “in the water, the rules and norms of society dissolve and the power of the ocean to connect and spread happiness is huge.” However, this study shows that this argument is right only to a certain extent. Also in the ocean, some structures and norms which exist on land are prevalent. For example, some women report that they try to stay away from male surfers in the water, because if other locals saw them talking to them, they might get into trouble. As one female surfer explains:

And when they see me just talking to a guy, just being friendly in the water, they start assuming so many things. And then that's where my reputation just collapses. I feel like it's really hard being a girl here and just doing what you want, even though you are not doing anything bad. Like for example, it's just me going surfing and saying Hi to a friend. And then people on the beach, they could see that I am talking to some guy and they would just assume that I am doing something bad and they would start talking amongst themselves or tell my boyfriend. My boyfriend then, was just like, ‘Well you know how people are here. Maybe you should stay away from guys in the water in general.’

This example illustrates that some women surfers cannot feel completely “free” when they are surfing. Nevertheless surfing can still provide them a space to escape their worries and to enjoy themselves, which contributes to their overall mental well-being.

Furthermore, some women state that surfing “makes them a better person”, as they became not only happier, but also calmer, less angry and more accepting in their lives. They regard the ocean as their teacher, from which they can learn life lessons. For example, some women feel more accepting and patient in her life, because through surfing, they have learned to accept that sometimes there are just no waves. Also Mandari regards the ocean as her teacher, comparing it to a mother who teaches her about life, for example to let go of control:

I always feel like the ocean is like a mother, kind of terrifying (laughing) but also like all-encompassing and loving. [...] I feel like all worries just go away and it just kind of washes you clean. [...] And surfing, the ocean is like it envelopes you, it just embraces you and I have realized that just through surfing, to let go of control also. [...] When I got stuck in one of these tumbling things, in a wave basically being held down, and you are trying to fight it and come up, it pushes you down further and you are feeling you are dying, but then the more you surf and the more you just let go and it brings you up almost too quickly. And I kind of like that, I love that. Cause it is just teaching you just to be. (Mandari, Interview 7)

Similarly, Ashley Blaylock, founder of a women’s surf camp in Nicaragua and CAMP BELLA, an annual week-long charity surfing programme which aims to empower young girls who have been the victims of sex trafficking, articulates that in her camps, she observed many personal transformations happening through the ocean:

Overcoming fears, navigating through challenges and learning how to go with the flow – the ocean always dictates – are all lessons learned paddling out beyond the breaks. The women who come here take those lessons back to their real lives and feel empowered. (Blaylock 2013)

These insights can be regarded as a form of individual empowerment, maybe even on a spiritual level. Additionally, surfing is not only good for the women's mental, but also their physical well-being. All Sri Lankan women surfers report that they became more active, healthy and fit through surfing, which might lead to an "embodied empowerment" (Bush 2016: 310). This is particularly relevant for the interviewees from rural families, who have mostly stopped doing any exercise after finishing school. In literature it is argued that through sport, women can generate a greater awareness of their bodies and its functions, and gain a greater sense of self-ownership and respect. This is also defined as "positive embodiment", which can allow women to find a healthy balance between caring for themselves and others (UN Women 2007: 2-12). Similarly, Granskog (2003: 34) concludes in her study about female triathletes, that "There is a sense of strength and power from within that one attains through exercise that is not easily attained by other means. One becomes reconnected to one's body; with embodiment comes empowerment." Based on this argument, also Bush (2016: 310) states in her study about women surfers from the US East coast that "surfing is a means of embodied empowerment for women. The personal challenge of surfing strengthens women's sense of self, making them feel stronger and more balanced in other areas of their lives as well." Thus, it is concluded that surfing can contribute to a form of embodied empowerment, which makes the women surfers from Sri Lanka feel stronger on the inside and outside.

6.1.4 'Power to' through learning skills?

Through surfing, all interviewees have learned new skills, which can strengthen their 'power to'. The theoretical concept of 'power to' refers to the individual power of people and their potential to realize their own interests and to create new possibilities of actions. With 'power to', individuals can increase the ability to resist and challenge the status of 'power over' (Rowlands 1997: 12-14).

First of all, the women surfers from Sri Lanka improved their swimming and surfing skills. In this regard, the SDO A LIQUID FUTURE (2016) highlights the urgent need for women from coastal communities to learn swimming, as it can save their lives. According to a study by OXFAM, women are four times more likely to die in tsunamis than men, because they are usually physically weaker and cannot swim or climb trees (MacDonald 2005). Hence, learning how to

swim and surf can help women to gain life-saving skills, to develop a better understanding of the ocean, and in the long run, to provide them with job opportunities in the surf industry or tourism sector. Another skill, which might not be fostered through surfing as a sport, but rather as a form of tourism, is learning English. Many of the women who grew up in the rural town of Arugam Bay did not learn English properly at school, but managed to gain basic English skills through their interactions with tourists. As with surfing, knowledge of English can help the women get a job in the tourism sector, which may in turn empower them economically by granting their own income (Eyben et al. 2008: 9).

Furthermore, in the interviews it became obvious that through surfing, the women became more aware of their own interests, began to set themselves goals, and developed a willingness to work towards them. This is clearly connected to the theoretical concept of 'individual agency', which is defined as the ability to set one's own goals and act upon them. Agency includes motivation, action and self-reflection (Kabeer 2001: 20f.; Kabeer 2005: 15). All interviewees, no matter their socio-economic background, dream of improving their surf skills and try to work towards this. Surfing is a difficult sport to learn as it requires consistency and patience, and the women are aware that they must work hard to achieve their goals. As Asheni points out:

You have to be very patient to be able to surf. [...] You know, the transition from catching your own wave alone, about understanding the wave. [...] And I think in general life, I become more like, Okay, you need to train, you need to wait, you need to be consistent to get something. And I think with surfing I understood it more than with any other thing. Cause I guess these days it's so easy with the internet and all these fast things, that you get what you want. You want something, you get it. Whereas with surfing, you just can't get it (laughing). It's not like that. So, I think it really helped me to be more patient. Like you will see the results but you need to dedicate time and effort and do it properly. (Asheni, Interview 2)

The women surfers from higher-socio economic backgrounds, in particular, practice regularly in order to improve their surfing abilities. However, in this regard, the women with rural backgrounds are confronted with limitations when working towards their surfing goals and exercising their individual agency, as they are constrained by long-established restrictive structures on land. Similarly, a study about the experiences of female footballers from Zambia, who participate in a Sport for Development programme, concludes that despite the fact that the young women felt stronger and more self-confident, they faced difficulties to gain more agency in their communities (Jeanes/Magee 2014: 146). This illustrates that agency always depends on the structures individuals find themselves in. At this stage, a brief excursus is made, in order to summarize the structural constraints and challenges that (aspiring) women surfers from Sri Lanka have to deal with.

6.1.5 Excursus: Constraints and Challenges

When analysing the potential of surfing for women's empowerment, it is crucial not to overlook its negative impacts and constraints. In Sri Lanka, many women surfers are confronted with several obstacles, which are the results of underlying power structures, in which surfing takes place. Many of these challenges can be traced back to gender, but also class, race, religion or regionality play a role. In this study, the challenges and constraints of the women surfers are mentioned throughout the analysis, however, at this stage a brief overview is provided. This summary can help for a better understanding of the situation, but it cannot fully depict the complex reality.

In sport sociology, it is argued that "sport is a microcosm of society" (Weiss 1990), where the rules, norms and power structures of society are reflected. Thus, gender relations in everyday life are also mirrored in sports. In Arugam Bay, and all over Sri Lanka, women are more restricted from participating in sports than men. Sri Lankan scholar Nanayakkara (2011: 153) argues that women's sport is often trivialized and only "a very low percentage of Sri Lankan females take part actively in sports." This also applies to the sport of surfing.

When I came to Arugam Bay, I quickly noticed that there were almost no local women surfers in the water. This stands in contrast to the local men, who seem to be more free to grab their boards and go for a surf. I started asking around, why there were so few local women surfing, and the most common answers were that Sri Lankan women could not swim, that they were afraid of the ocean or that they wanted to avoid getting darker skin. However, there are many girls and women who would have the desire to engage in surfing – just like their brothers, cousins or fathers – but they are often restricted. So, the question is, why are Sri Lankan women restricted from surfing? Based on literature research, participant observations and interviews, *socio-cultural*, *economic* and *institutionalized* barriers were identified as the main reasons.

Socio-cultural constraints are all kind of barriers that relate to Sri Lankan culture and the social relationships of the women. At this stage, it is important to reflect that Sri Lanka is a multi-cultural country, with people from many different ethnicities (e.g. Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims) and religions (e.g. Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam). In Arugam Bay, all women surfers belonged to the Sinhalese or Tamil culture – there was not one female Muslim surfer. This suggests that religion and cultural beliefs might be a restrictive factor. However, this was not examined in more detail in this thesis, and the situation might be specific for Arugam Bay.

Looking out of Sri Lanka, Muslim women are increasingly getting engaged in surfing, for example in Morocco, Iran, Indonesia or Bangladesh (see Guibert/Arab 2017; Britton 2017; A Liquid Future 2016; King 2015). In a short film about Muslim surfers in California, one woman even states that she connects to Allah through surfing (KCET SoCalConnected 2015).

The interviewees in this study were all allowed to go surfing by their families, but they all know other Sri Lankan women who were not. The main reasons why their families or husbands do not want them to surf are because they regard the ocean as a dangerous place and they want to limit their interactions with other men. Furthermore, some families seem to be afraid that their daughters might get a bad reputation, as the surf culture is often associated with the “beach boy culture”¹⁵ and parties, sex and alcohol. On top of that, there is a social pressure of maintaining fair skin, which is considered the beauty ideal in South Asia (Shankar/Subish 2007). Another restrictive factor concerns the many duties that Sri Lankan women have in the household; especially for married women with children it would be difficult to find time for surfing.

Some of these constraints also count for the interviewed women surfers, especially for the ones with a rural background. For example, many women from Arugam Bay were only allowed to surf under certain conditions: they usually were not allowed to surf alone, but only within the GIRLS MAKE WAVES-lessons or when they were accompanied by a more experienced surfer who was trusted by the family. As Ayomi puts it: “I want to have my own board and go surfing alone. [...] But my family does not allow it because it is not safe to go alone for a girl.” (Interview 6) Consequently, they are dependent on the support of others and cannot go surfing regularly. If they resist, they might have to deal with negative consequences, such as physical violence. For example, Jayani was probably the very first surfer girl in Sri Lanka in the 1980s. However, when she reached puberty, she was forced to stop surfing with all means, as she explains:

I was 14 or 15. And then my dad tried to stop me. One day, I came back from school and I took the surf board again and surfed all day. And then I came home and my dad took the surf board off me and got the axe and then cut it in half. He said: You are not going to surf again. (Jayani, Interview 21)

This example illustrates an overall trend in Sri Lanka, particularly in rural areas: Once young girls have reached puberty, they are commonly more restricted to participate in the public space than before and their interactions with boys are limited by their families (Herath 2015: 6). As

¹⁵ In this thesis, the term “beach boys” refers to local surfers who have the reputation of partying, drinking alcohol, taking drugs and having affairs with tourist girls.

children, Sri Lankan boys and girls can usually both play outside and mix with each other. For example, in the surfing lessons from SURFING THE NATIONS as well as the SURF KIDS CLUB MEDDAWATTA *both* boys and girls participate – but still, the boys outnumber the girls in both surfing programmes. Katerina Petrouskova, founder of the SURF KIDS CLUB MEDDAWATTA, reports that rural girls are more protected by their families than boys. For example, she explains that every now and then, some mothers come to the surf lessons and watch out for their daughters; however, this has never been the case for a son (Interview 5). Nevertheless, surfing for girls seems to be accepted within the communities. Tiffany Carothers, for instance, reports that nobody from the community ever said a bad word to her about the young girls being engaged in surfing (Interview 16).

Furthermore, there are *economic constraints* that might prevent Sri Lankan women from surfing. According to Nanayakkara (2011), poverty is the main reason that prevents Sri Lankan women from participating in sports as they prioritize “survival needs”. In general, surfing is not an affordable sport for everyone as it requires higher expenses for the equipment. Particularly in Sri Lanka, surf boards are expensive for locals as the boards need to be imported. However, compared to some other sports, surfing might not be that expensive because the “playground” is for free. In this sphere, it becomes obvious that the access is not only restricted by gender, but also by class. While only one woman from Arugam Bay possesses her own board (which was a gift from tourists), all intermediate surfers from higher socio-economic backgrounds possess their own.

In addition, there are some *institutionalized constraints*, because in Sri Lanka, surfing is a rather new sport and is not supported by local authorities, the government or schools. At the local level, there are about a dozen surf clubs – however, they only consist of male members and there is no women’s surf club in the country. Additionally, there is no female surf instructor in Arugam Bay as the local girls do not have the level to teach others yet, and foreign women are not allowed to work as an instructor, in order to protect the local income. Nevertheless, the president of the ARUGAM BAY SURF CLUB, Krishanta Ariyasena, is optimistic that surfing will become more prominent in the future, particularly because it is included at the next Olympic Games. Furthermore, in February 2018, a major step towards the professionalization of the surf sport happened, when the newly formed SURFING FEDERATION OF SRI LANKA (SFSL) got accepted by the INTERNATIONAL SURFING ASSOCIATION (ISA 2018). So far, there are only male members in the federation, but informal conversations showed that many surfer boys and men

are interested in having female members on board. This might be a next step to “push” women’s surfing in Sri Lanka.

When considering all these barriers, it becomes clear that it is not an easy journey to become a female surfer in Sri Lanka. And even when the women are backed up by their families and are allowed to engage in surfing, they still have to face some challenges: Almost all interviewees report that they have been facing some resistance by other local people at least once during their surfing career, which ranges from bad comments over sexual harassment to deformation. In 2015, there was even a police investigation in Arugam Bay, as some local people wanted to stop women’s surfing and hence spread wrong rumours, such as that the girls took drugs after the GIRLS MAKE WAVES lessons. Even though the investigation concluded that the girls had not done anything wrong, the surf lessons were forced to stop on a regular basis, due to the on-going pressure of some community leaders.

In general, the women surfers report about negative experiences in the area of Arugam Bay as well as at surf spots in the South-West of Sri Lanka. The amount of hassling varies and does not happen to all of them on the same basis. The women surfers who are *not* from Arugam Bay report more about getting sexually insulted, which might be because they wear bikinis and surf by themselves or together with male friends. The resistance usually comes from local men – living in the area or coming as visitors – from all three main cultures, the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim one. Based on the interviews and personal observations, the main reasons why some local people try to prevent local women from surfing seem to be related to sexism, jealousy and the fear of a cultural change. As Nanayakkara (2012: 1887) states: “The body in sport and the female body in particular is a location for debate about the changing nature of ideology, power, social structures and cultural systems.” This argument is further examined in chapter 6.4.1, on the socio-cultural level.

6.1.6 Summary

Since the women had started surfing, they have noticed several positive changes in their personalities, bodies, skills and lifestyles, which are all related to processes of individual empowerment. On a psychological level, the women report that through surfing, they expanded their horizons of possibility, became more self-confident, developed a trust in themselves, overcame fears, deepened their relationship with the ocean and became happier, calmer, more accepting and less angry. This is all related to the development of ‘power from within’ and ‘power to’, as stated in women’s empowerment literature (Rowlands 1997: 13). On the “outside”, the women feel healthier, more active and physically stronger, which can lead to an “embodied empowerment” (Granskog 2003; Bush 2016: 310). In addition, they improved their swimming and surfing skills. In terms of their lifestyle, surfing represents a new hobby, something to look forward to. Surfing is important for the women’s overall well-being and provides them an avenue to escape their daily routines or worries for a while. At the personal level, empowerment centres on the *individual* – which means that the effects of surfing could be similar for both women and men surfers. Similarly, Sanduni states: “I feel like surfing doesn't really empower me as a *woman*. It just empowers me as a human being.” (Interview 4)

In Sri Lanka, surfing happens *within* patriarchal structures, where men usually have power *over* women. Thus, it is more difficult for women to participate in surfing as they are confronted with more obstacles than their male counterparts, and are limited to exercise their individual agency. If empowerment is seen as a process where women “maximise opportunities available to them without constraint” (Rowlands 1997: 13), the potential of surfing for women’s empowerment is limited. All women surfers from Sri Lanka are confronted with several constraints on a socio-cultural, economic and institutionalized level. This particularly refers to the women surfers from rural and working-class backgrounds, which highlights the importance of intersectionality in gender analysis. In addition, the women have to deal with resistance from local men, who want to prevent them from contesting existing gender relations. Nevertheless, in this regard it is argued that some women surfers might undo their “internalized oppression” as they do not accept unfair practices as “normal” anymore. They are all aware that they are disadvantaged in comparison to men, and want to do something about it. This is clearly related to a “shift of consciousness”, which is the first step towards women’s empowerment (Cornwall/Edwards 2014).

6.2 Relational Level

Women's empowerment is also a *relational* process as it is located within existing power structures and relationships that influence the outcome (Rowlands 1997: 129f.). In Sri Lanka, society is based on a patriarchal system, where men have dominance over women in many regards. For example, women are often treated as subordinates and their opinions matter less than men's in both private and public spheres of life (Herath 2015: 1ff.; Darj et al. 2017). At a relational level, women's empowerment is about changing social relationships towards more equality, in reference to decision-making or status (Maholtra et al. 2002: 13). Women develop the ability to negotiate, communicate or defend themselves in relation to others (Rowlands 1997: 15; 120).

In this regard, for many interviewees, surfing has changed how they interact with other people and how other people interact with them – positively as well as negatively. In the following, it is examined what impacts surfing had on decision-making processes and how it influenced the women surfers' negotiation and communication skills. In addition, the relationship between surfing and respect is explored, as well its potential for connection.

6.2.1 The Influence of Surfing on Decision-Making

In terms of decision-making, Sri Lankan women are usually expected to listen to their fathers, brothers or husbands, particularly in rural areas (Herath 2015: 7f.). Similarly, the women from Arugam Bay report that they usually cannot freely choose what they want to do or how they want to be like. This concerns daily decisions, such as “Can I go to the beach?” as well as long-term choices, like “Who can I marry?”. The unmarried women are commonly expected to obey their parents or brothers; sometimes they negotiate and make decisions together with them. In marriage, usually the husband has the last word. A few interviewees, however, emphasize that their husbands “give them freedom” or that they are equally responsible for the decision-making in their marriage. For instance, Shehara states, “After marriage, I also go surfing. He [Her husband] gives me more freedom for my life. I also give him freedom. Because he always plays cricket. I like surfing.” (Interview 8) In addition, the process of decision-making is not only connected to gender, but also to the socio-economic background: women from urban, middle-

class families are usually more independent (Herath 2015: 1ff.), which was also confirmed by the interviewees who grew up in the capital or abroad.

In the following, it is argued that surfing can increase the ability to make decisions, as the women surfers constantly need to make choices in the water: Do I paddle for this wave? Or do I wait for the next one? In surfing, there is an informal etiquette, which serves as a guideline on who has priority for a wave. But, as in other action sports, there are no formal rules and individuals are responsible for their own decisions (Thorpe 2014b: 44). Every surfer must choose by themselves, which wave they select and if their skills are sufficient for the conditions. Consequently, the women surfers from Sri Lanka constantly need to make their own decisions – an ability that is often denied to them back on land. Furthermore, in the water, the women directly get a response to their decisions from the ocean. There is a saying that “a wave is a mirror to our souls – it reflects our commitment, our fear and willingness to face it.” (Britton 2015: 121) This means that if the women surfers fully commit to a wave, they are likely to be rewarded with a good ride. However, if they try only a little bit, they are likely to wipe out¹⁶. In this matter, all interviewees report that their commitment is reflected in the waves they take. For example, Mandari explains that when she feels insecure, she does not catch many waves or is likely to fall off. In contrast, when she feels committed, she goes for more waves and is likely to succeed. On top of that, she achieves everything by herself, which makes her feel self-confident and builds a trust in herself (Interview 7).

Similar observations are made in Indonesia, where Lizzie Murray from A LIQUID FUTURE reports that the surfer girls who participate in her surfing programme gained an increase in their individual decision-making. For example, the surfer girls are not shy anymore to tell the surfer boys when it is *their* turn to surf. Murray assumes that this increased ability stems from the constant choices they make in the water, as she points out:

I think, it is probably because – from my personal experiences and maybe from observation – in surfing you have to rely on yourself, and you have to make judgements and decisions. You know, am I paddling for this wave or can I handle these conditions etc. And as [...] women we are so often used to be more told what to do. [...] follow a man or have the man protect us or look after us. [...] And I think that's what so liberating for women [in surfing]. You have to seize. And that's it. And if you think you can do it, you gonna do it. And I think that builds such trust in relying on your instincts and who you are as a woman. (Murray, Interview 1)

Consequently, it is argued that surfing can not only strengthen the ability of decision-making, but also facilitates an increase in trust in oneself. In this regard, it is stressed that the more

¹⁶ Wipe out: Falling off, or being knocked off the surfboard when riding a wave.

experienced the surfer women are, the more they trust in themselves. For example, Shehara reports that in the beginning, she did not know much about surfing and hence listened to the more advanced surfers which waves she should pick. But as she learned more, she started to trust herself to make her own choices. As she proudly points out:

Sometimes, when I am surfing, the boys are coming and say: 'Ah Shehara, take this one!' Sometimes, they tell me bad waves. [Because] They want to wait for a good one [themselves]. I say: 'No no, you can take this one. I don't take the bad one.' (Shehara, Interview 8)

Furthermore, it needs to be emphasized that these experiences only refer to the intermediate surfers who can catch waves by themselves. The beginner surfers are usually pushed into the waves by a surf instructor and do not make their own choices.

As a next step, it could be assumed that the women surfers bring their increased ability in decision-making back to the shore. However, the interviews show that surfing seems to have no influence on decision-making processes in the household. For instance, many interviewees from Arugam Bay highlight that, if a family member with a higher status tells them something, they have to respect that decision, or otherwise they might have to deal with negative reactions. Similarly, Britton (2015: 125) states that in the ocean, unequal structures might dissolve, but "coming ashore again can be a challenge. These 'rules and norms' have been carefully built and protected for centuries, if not millennia. It is hard to believe that just adding surfing can change anything, that the simple act of wave-riding could break them." Likewise, Jeanes and Magee (2014: 146) conclude that the female Zambian football players in their study were not able to change repressive relationships on the household level, simply by participating in a sport-for-development initiative. As they articulate:

Despite stating that playing football made them more confident and the broader educational element of the initiative had taught them about their right to 'stand up for themselves', they indicated that this did not translate into being able to negotiate a way out of these unequal relationships [in their homes]. (Jeanes/Magee 2014: 146)

Consequently, it is argued that surfing does not have the power to change long-established social structures overnight. It can only be shown in the future, whether the women's increased ability to make decisions in the water might distil on land in the long run. However, it always needs to be considered that empowerment is a *relational* process, and it also requires a change in behaviour of the men to gain "sustainable" empowerment (Rowlands 1997: 132).

6.2.2 Challenges as Springboard for Women's Empowerment

As highlighted in the excursus, the women surfers from Sri Lanka are confronted with several constraints when they participate in surfing. Nevertheless, these challenges can also be regarded as springboard for empowerment processes, because the women defend and negotiate their interests in front of others (Rowlands 1997: 119f.). In Sri Lanka, women are usually not actively encouraged to express their own opinion (Herath 2015: 6). However, with surfing, the women found an activity which they love – something, that is worth “fighting for”.

Regarding their challenges, particularly the women from Arugam Bay report that they are not shy anymore to defend their decisions in front of others, as long as they are backed up by their families. For example, Bandhini and Minrada explain that a tuk-tuk driver once told them on the way home from surfing that they should better stay at home with their children. As a reaction, they stood up for themselves and justified themselves, and Bandhini told the tuk-tuk driver: “I said, this is my choice! I like [surfing], I can go, no problem! My husband says nothing. Who are you? Who are you that you are telling me?” (Interview 19) Similarly, some of the younger unmarried women have started to defend their decisions. As Susanthika points out:

People are always judging. So after surfing, when I started to face a lot of people's comments and stuff, it made me bolder. [...] The way I am talking to people is different [now]. Because before, I was afraid to talk about my opinion and I was shy. But now, after surfing, because I met a lot of people and had a chat with them, I am not that much afraid with my own opinion [anymore] and say something. I am not shy [anymore]. (Susanthika, Interview 10)

However, this does not count for all women surfers. Some of them also report that they prefer ignoring the comments of others, instead of “talking back” and having an argument. In addition, the women from Arugam Bay usually only defend their decisions if they are supported by their families. Consequently, the amount of empowerment is limited and the women do not gain a more equal status in their community (Rowlands 1997: 119f.; Malhotra et al. 2002: 13). Another limitation is that in this study it could not be found out, whether the women's increased negotiation skills might have transferred to other spheres of their lives. Nevertheless, some women surfers report that through surfing, they have become more open and talkative towards other people, because they started to have small talks with other surfers in the water.

6.2.3 Between Respect and Harassment

As already mentioned, the women surfers are confronted with mixed reactions from others, both good and negative ones. They feel particularly supported by Western tourists, who usually first react surprised to see a local woman surfing, but then are curious to learn more about their stories and encourage them to keep surfing. Some women report that this makes them feel a bit “special” or “famous”, and others think that surfing gave them an identity as a “strong” or “bold” woman. These experiences refer to processes of women’s empowerment again, as in theory, empowerment at a relational level is about having respect for oneself, as well as receiving and giving respect from and to others (Rowlands 1997: 119f.).

Overall, the women surfers from Sri Lanka gained some more respect from others – however, only to a certain extent and from specific groups. Whereas local *non-surfers*, especially men from the wider community and male tourists from other parts of Sri Lanka, regularly discourage and disrespect the women surfers, other *surfers* – male and female, local and foreigner – usually encourage them and show them their respect that they are participating in surfing. The interviewees report that some surfers are aware that it usually takes more efforts for a woman from Sri Lanka to participate in surfing than for a middle-class woman from the Global North, and that consequently, they earn respect for their efforts of taking part in a sport, which is considered a male’s domain in their country. According to the interviewees, also many local surfer boys expressed the wish that more Sri Lankan women were surfing. These boys also support them every now and then, e.g. by giving them a lesson. Nevertheless, the women wished that they were more supported by their male counterparts. In addition, some women feel like they got more respect from family members, as surfing shows them as an “active” and “strong” person. As Susanthika states: “Surfing gave me like an identity. Because it shows me as a bold girl to a lot of people. [...] My family feels like I am a strong person after surfing.” (Interview 10)

However, most of the beginner surfers do not really feel respected for being “a surfer”, while highlighting that also they *themselves* do not feel like a “real surfer” yet. The intermediate surfers report about mixed experiences. On the one hand, they get compliments from others and two women have even been encouraged by male surfer friends to participate in a women’s surf contest in India. But on the other hand, they sometimes feel like they are not taken seriously by other male surfers, a fact which they relate to sexism. Sanduni thinks that most surfers do not care where other surfers are from, however, she noticed that *women* are treated differently in

the water, just because of their gender. Consequently, she feels like she must prove herself to the male surfers first, in order to gain respect.

I get it a lot. He [a local surfer] is just like, 'Oh you're a girl, you have to paddle faster.' I just hate it when they do that. They assume that I am a lot weaker than them, because I am a girl. But then I feel like, [...] I have to prove them something. To show them that I can surf. And then only they will shut up. So it's basically me going out in the water and my first wave is to prove all the men there that I can surf. (Sanduni, Interview 4)

Similar experiences are reported in a case study about women surfers in Byron Bay in Australia, who regard surfing as a "patronizing experience" (Olive et al. 2015). Nevertheless, the example of Sanduni shows that the women surfers learn how to claim their respect in the water. Likewise, in the study about women surfers from the US East Coast, Bush (2016: 299) reports that for the women surfers, processes of empowerment took place, as they gained the respect of the male surfers in the water: "Empowerment also came from 'holding their own' in a male-dominated sport. This was both a physical challenge and a mental one. Women talked about 'fighting for waves' among men and 'gaining the respect' of their male counterparts." In this regard, Mandari thinks that most local people do not develop more respect towards women surfers, unless they reach a certain level:

So, for me, I am not very good. I can surf but I am not very good. So, a lot of the local surfers... I mean they are not horrible to me, but they would not really be like 'Oh wow cool'. It is more just kind of, 'Oh I am trying something', it is more like a joke. (Mandari, Interview 7)

She assumes that the better the women surf, the more respect they might gain – similar to the story of India's first surfer women Ishita Malaviya, who is now a role model for many children in her country (Delhunty 2016). She hopes that in the future, women's surfing will be an accepted sport in Sri Lanka, as she points out:

What I really would like to see is to be able to go out and not have anyone saying anything and not have anyone laugh at you or make you feel small. [...] I want that to happen. Cause I feel like, with this community where I belong, I feel save already. I don't need to do anything to approve it to them. Whereas what I want to change would be the really *local* communities being cool with it and just like kind of having the respect. Like the Indian girl who surfs, everyone was laughing at her and kind of ridiculing her and saying, 'Cover up' and 'blababla'. But now, that she has come to a certain level, they all respect her and are like 'Wow, she is cool' or 'She is awesome' and are very proud on her and stuff. But I feel like here, I would love that. I would love that kind of level 'Oh cool, you surf' and just be more encouraging than bullying you down about it. (Mandari, Interview 7)

Likewise in Indonesia, Lizzie Murray observed that in the beginning, the boys were making a bit of fun of the surfer girls, but eventually, their perspectives changed and they started to see the girls in a new light, even being mesmerized by how graceful and powerful they were able to move in the waves (Interview 1).

In addition, it is argued that mixed surf lessons for children, such as in the KIDS SURF CLUB MEDDAWATTA in the South of Sri Lanka or the SURF & SWIM programme of STN, can play a crucial role regarding relational empowerment. When both boys and girls are participating in the lessons, the children can see that they are all equal and develop respect for each other at a young age. Also Yaliagny Guerrero Prieto from the SDO CUBANITAS SURF in Cuba states that mixing boys and girls in the surf lessons, “educates young males to respect what girls are capable of” (Britton 2015: 123). Similarly, when I was participating in the surf lessons of STN, I observed that the children usually encouraged each other – no matter whether they were a girl or a boy.

Apart from the respect of some other people, some women feel respected by something else: the ocean. As Susanthika highlights: “The ocean doesn’t care who I am. Only people care about that.” (Interview 10) This reminds of a saying of the big wave pro surfer Keala Kennelly, who stated after winning the Billabong XXL award: “When you ride one of those big waves, it doesn’t matter what you got between your legs!” (Britton 2015: 119) Hence, it can be argued that the women get respect from the ocean as the ocean does not discriminate. These experiences can be linked to the ‘power from within’ again, which is based on self-acceptance and self-respect. It implies seeing others as equals and claiming respect from others, as well as showing respect to others (Rowlands 1997: 13). Thus, surfing might contribute to the realization that everyone is equal – because the ocean does not distinguish between gender, race or class – and consequently, that everyone should be treated equally with the same respect. So surfing might lead to *getting* respect as well as to *claiming* respect from others.

6.2.4 The Power of Connection

In mainstream development, it is suggested that “sport has the power to transcend boundaries of sex, race, religion and nationality.” (UN Women 2018) This can also be applied to the sport of surfing. For example, Britton (2017: 793) states in her case study about women surfers in Iran: “Surfing has become a sport initiated by women and a medium to connect across gender, class, ethnic and religious divides within the country.” Similarly, Lizzie Murray argues that surfing has the power to connect, because “we are all equal in the ocean. When you are in the ocean, that can be dangerous and imposing, there aren’t really any differences.” She particularly highlights the “elemental force” of the ocean:

[Surfing is a] very peaceful activity that, I think, brings down boundaries because you are stepping into an element that is more powerful than you are. So I think, it is a great leveller of human nature. Just saying this, if the world was gonna be invaded by aliens, I am sure - we all forget our differences, group together and try to fend off the evil aliens. And when you step into the ocean, and there is a big wave coming and you're frightened or whatever, you forget your differences and ask someone to help you or whatever. So, it brings down a lot of boundaries. (Murray, Interview 1)

As follows, it is argued that surfing can create a bond between surfers as they share the same waves, passions and values. In the interviews, some women mention that they feel immediately connected to other surfers, because they usually have similar interests, such as being connected to nature or pursuing a “simple”, non-materialistic lifestyle. In addition, some women highlight that they connect, as “only a surfer knows the feeling”. Similarly, as the Hawaiian surfer Rell Sun once put it: “If you share the ocean, well then you’re completely bonded because that’s like being blood brothers or blood sisters.” (cited in Britton 2015: 127)

In Sri Lanka, all interviewees build friendships with other surfers, no matter their gender, class or culture. However, in this regard it seems easier for the women from middle-class, urban backgrounds to bond with other male surfers, as some of the rural women mention that they try to stay away from other male surfers, particularly tourists. Nevertheless, they also all have a few male surfer friends, especially the local surfer boys from their village. In regard to women’s empowerment, the local male surfers might play an important role. Most of them have not actively supported the women surfers yet – however, many interviewees report that the local surfer boys would be happy if more local women participated in surfing. As Rowlands (1997: 132) highlights, the empowerment of women is not only a woman’s concern, but a *gender* issue: To see substantial changes towards gender equality, it also needs the willingness and support of men to overcome unequal power relations. Hence, if the surfer men made a first step to support their female counterparts, the women were more likely to practice their agency. In the long run, this transformation of power structures at the surfing level might be transferred to other spheres as well.

6.2.5 Summary

On the relational level, it becomes clear that surfing is limited in its potential to empower, as the women's increased 'power within' and 'power to' cannot be exercised back on land, where patriarchal structures remain dominant, especially on the household level. This illustrates that for women's empowerment, it also needs a change of the men's attitudes and behaviour (Rowlands 1997: 132). Nevertheless, surfing can contribute to relational empowerment in some regards: First of all, surfing can strengthen *individual* decision-making, as in the water, the women surfers constantly need to make their own decisions, something which is usually denied to them on land. As the ocean directly responds to their commitment, the women surfers learn to trust in themselves and their instincts. In the long run, this increased ability might influence decision-making processes on the household level, however, this would need to be internalized much longer. So far, surfing was clearly limited in influencing *relational* decision-making on the household level.

Second, the Sri Lankan women surfers increased their negotiation skills. Surfing made them more self-confident, and they have learned to defend their decisions in front of other people who make bad comments about them. Furthermore, the women became less shy and more open towards other people, which might be the result of their increased interaction with other surf tourists. Third, the women gained an increase of respect from certain groups, particularly from other surfers, tourists and sometimes their families, as surfing gave them a "strong" identity. However, they sometimes also got more harassment than respect – particularly from local men who do not want the local gender order to change.

Finally, the women have developed friendships with other surfers, no matter their gender, socio-economic status or cultural background. Through surfing, they share the same passions and consequently bond with each other. In regard to women's empowerment, the local male surfers might play an important role, as they could help to create an environment, where the women surfers could exercise their 'power from within' and 'power to'. As Rowlands states:

If men become less willing to use 'power over' in their relationships with women, whether in the home, in the workplace or in the community, it not only directly reduces the obstacles women face in their own empowerment process, but also helps to create an environment where the use of power in other forms becomes more possible. (1997: 132)

6.3 Collective level

In the theoretical model of Rowlands (1997: 116), on the collective level, women develop a group identity and a sense of collective agency, which is closely related to the concept of ‘power with’. Through collective action, individuals gain more power to negotiate their interests than alone; they develop a collective feeling of “We can”. Similarly, it is argued that the women surfers from Sri Lanka have developed a “surfer girl” or “surfer women” identity – at least, to a certain extent. While the women surfers from Arugam Bay spend more time together and have developed a sense of “sisterhood”, the urban women surfers are not integrated into a community of local female surfers, but rather into a mix of local male surfers and tourists or expats from both genders. Hence, the following insights mostly refer to the experiences of the women surfers from Arugam Bay.

6.3.1 Surfer Identity and Sisterhood

Through surfing, the interviewees from Arugam Bay share a common hobby and spend more time together than before. After the women left school or got married, they have lived more isolated, without any regular activities outside their homes. Hence surfing, – as well as the other community activities of STN – brought them closer together and enabled them to acquire a social network outside of familial structures, which is another indicator for empowerment (Malhotra et al. 2002: 13). Even though surfing is an individual sport, the *social* component of surfing is very important for all interviewees. They highlight that for them, it is “special” to surf with their girlfriends, as they are happy to share the experience and they feel more comfortable together. In this regard, Comley (2016: 1296) argues that surfing with an “army of women” can create a feeling of being “empowered” by each other. Similarly, Bush (2016: 302f.) concludes that for the women surfers in her study, the “social experience” is more important than “catching waves”, which de-emphasizes the competitive aspect of surfing and departs from the norms of the male-dominated and performance-oriented surf culture.

The interviewees did not mention it themselves, but it was observed that the women from Arugam Bay have developed sort of a common “surfer women” identity. Even though they cannot surf regularly due to their dependency on others, they like to talk about surfing with each other and feel connected, as they share the same passion. Also the people in the village know

that they surf – it kind of distinguishes them from other women and thus gives them a common identity to a certain extent. Similarly, Lizzie Murray argues that the girls in Indonesia have developed a common “surfer girl” identity as their lives revolve around surfing. For them, it is particularly “empowering” to have a common surfer uniform, as it gives them a sense of belonging (Interview 1).

Having a common identity can contribute to the process of women’s empowerment as sharing the same passions and concerns can create a bond between women, and gives them a feeling of greater strength. It enables ‘power with’, because together, they can negotiate their interests better than alone (Rowlands 1997: 13). This reminds of the concept of ‘sisterhood’, which can be defined as “the solidarity of women based on shared conditions, experiences, or concerns” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary n.d.). In this regard, sisterhood is regarded in the meaning of bell hooks (1986), as she points out that sisterhood – and feminism in general – is not about the victimization of women. Sisterhood is not based on common oppression, but on a common *vision* to end sexist, racist, heterosexist and classist oppression. As she points out:

Women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression. We do not need anti-male sentiments to bond us together, so great is the wealth of experience, culture, and ideas we have to share with one another. We can be sisters united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression, united in political solidarity. (hooks 1986: 138)

In this meaning, sisterhood is based on a “community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around which to unite” (ibid. 138). Likewise, all interviewees have a similar vision: they dream of a future, where surfing is an accepted sport for women and where they have more equality in the water and on land.

In the past, the women surfers from Arugam Bay have already shown tendencies of ‘power with’ and sisterhood: For example, it is suggested that the “take off” of women’s surfing in Arugam Bay in 2015 was enabled by the fact that the women started surfing *together* – this way, it was not a single woman standing out of the crowd and going “against the norms”, but the women as a *group*, which gave them a collective feeling of “We can do it”. In this regard, some women report that they wanted to start surfing because “everybody was going for it” and they felt more comfortable together with their friends. Hence, it is argued that through collective action, the women surfers could make a bigger influence together than alone (Rowlands 1997: 13). Furthermore, the women surfers have developed a sense of sisterhood, as they support each other. For instance, when some surfer girls were not allowed to surf by their families, other

surfer women went to their parents and explained the benefits to them. Consequently, they convinced some parents to allow their daughters to surf, at least under certain conditions (e.g. supervision of a more experienced surfer).

Another example, where their solidarity becomes particularly obvious, refers to the resistance against the GIRLS MAKE WAVES-lessons and the following police investigation in 2015, where the women report that they stood up for themselves and told their opinions to the police. One woman (who was not interviewed as she had moved away) even went to the local authorities and got herself a letter signed that it is her *right* as a woman to surf. This is closely related to political empowerment, which is described as the process of gaining knowledge about one's rights and the ability to "speak about" and "speak for oneself" (Eyben et al. 2008: 15). However, even though the police investigation concluded that the participants of the GIRLS MAKE WAVES-programme had not done anything "wrong" or illegal, the pressure from some local leaders against women's surfing maintained. Subsequently, the women decided together that they wanted to stop surfing for a while, because they did not want to cause any more problems or harm to anyone. This example illustrates that, depending on the context, surfing might lead to disempowering practices as well. Nevertheless, over the next two years, the women from Arugam Bay have found some new ways to keep surfing, such as surfing together with family members or befriended tourists.

At time of research, however, most women surfers from Arugam Bay have stopped surfing temporarily, mostly due to their high dependency on others and their responsibilities in their homes. Nevertheless, many interviewees emphasize that they want to keep "fighting for surfing" and they are thinking about new ways to negotiate their constraints and go surfing more regularly. Some women also mention that they hope that through my "book" (thesis), the next generation will be inspired to fight for surfing, just like their mothers. As Minrada puts it:

[...] we will not stop surfing, like me, Shehara or Bandhini. And our children will see: 'Oh, my mum was surfing. We want to surf too. Before, women were fighting for surfing. Why don't we fight? We want to fight too! We will not listen to what our people are talking. We want to surf too!' (Minrada, Interview 13)

Like Minrada, most interviewees are optimistic that there will be a change in the future, where women's surfing will be more common and accepted in Sri Lanka, and they are also aware that they *themselves* play a key role in achieving the change they desire. How they want to work towards their goals is examined in the next two chapters.

6.3.2 The Importance of Role Models

All interviewees wish that there will be more surfer girls and women from Sri Lanka in the future, and they hope to inspire others with their stories. In the Sport for Development-discourse, the importance of role models is highlighted, as they can influence other women's self-perceptions. As UN Women (2018) put it: "Women in sport defy gender stereotypes, make inspiring role models, and show men and women as equals. Seeing is one step closer to being." In this regard, especially the "good" women surfers play a key role. For example, Shehara is the best female surfer from Arugam Bay and proves that "women can surf too". She is already a role model for many aspiring surfer girls in her village, who dream to surf like her one day. Also Mandari, who is one of the pioneering women surfers from Sri Lanka, reports that she was inspired by another woman, namely Ishita Malaviya, the first Indian surfer woman. As she articulates:

[...] for me it is just, 'Wow, if she can do it. Why can't I?' You know, because she is like local and India is way more stuck up than Sri Lanka, way more strict, way more conventional. I think for me, that really inspires me. Like just watching her, doing her thing. (Mandari, Interview 7)

The examples of Shehara and Mandari illustrate that role models can show new possibilities and enable a "shift of consciousness" (Cornwall/Edwards 2014). Sanduni, who surfs in the South of Sri Lanka, reports that she did not think about her position as a role model before, but when I contacted her for an interview, she realized that she might be doing something "special" and could inspire others. However, she thinks that other local girls might not relate to her that much, because she is half Sri Lankan, half Swedish. She argues that one would need to find two or three *local* girls from the village who take the first step to start surfing – and the rest of the girls might follow (Interview 4). Similarly, Britton (2015: 126) states that, "Female role models from the local area are essential catalysts for change."

On top of that, it is not only the "good" surfers who can encourage others. Also some beginner surfers from Arugam Bay hope to inspire other women. They want to spread the word that surfing is "not against our culture" and lead by good example, showing that participating in surfing does not automatically mean turning into "beach girls" (referring to the beach boy culture). They hope that eventually, local people will accept women's surfing as it is "just women and water" (Minrada, Interview 13) and there is nothing "bad" about it. In this regard, the women surfers from Arugam Bay *conform* to current gender roles and norms, emphasizing that they only want to surf, but not engage in the surfer lifestyle of the Western tourists, who like to party or wear bikinis. In contrast, Britton argues that surfing might have the potential to

challenge gender norms and show new possibilities for women, “by exposure to counter-stereotypical images and delinking of negative association with these images” (Meier 2005, cited in Britton 2017: 799). This potential of surfing for contesting gender norms is examined more closely on the socio-cultural level in chapter 6.4.1.

Furthermore, it needs to be reflected that through my research, I have influenced the context as some interviewees learned more about other surfer girls and programmes. For example, some women from Arugam Bay did not know that Jayani, who grew up in Arugam Bay and now lives in Australia, already surfed in the 1980s (Interview 21). Or Sanduni, was not aware that there are surfing programmes like *GIRLS MAKE WAVES* on the East coast. Through sharing these stories, some women have started to feel more inspired, as she articulates:

You really inspired me to think about the situation more. And it did make me realize that surfing could help the women here. And now I kind of feel inspired to actually help and to do something to make it happen. I never thought about it but now, [...] it kind of makes me excited. I kind of want it [women’s surfing] to happen now. (Sanduni, Interview 4)

Similarly, Britton (2015: 125) hopes that “it will start with sharing these [surfer] stories, the aim of which is to show that other possibilities exist, to challenge and transform gender and social inequalities, to bridge our fear of the unknown and embrace the familiar.”

6.3.3 Potentials of a Women’s Surf Club

In order to become more independent from external support, such as the *GIRLS MAKE WAVES*-programme, the women surfers were thinking about alternatives, how they could become less dependent on others and how they could surf more regularly. In this regard, they emphasize that they “cannot do anything alone”, but together they can support each other. One idea, which stems from three surfer women from the village, is to set up a women’s surf club in the near future. Through the surf club, they want to create a safe space for interested local girls and women to learn surfing together, and subsequently set up a business, where they give surf lessons to female tourists. All interviewees from Arugam Bay like the idea and want to become a member, as a “women-only” surf club would make them feel more comfortable than joining a mixed surf club, where they might have to deal with sexism. Hence, the women’s surf club might provide them a safe space to learn surfing and strengthen their group identity and collective action. Similarly, a recent study about women surfers from California highlights the

“empowering” potential of an all-women surf club as it creates a space to improve abilities and to bond over womanhood (Comley 2016: 1295):

Joining an all-women surf club eventually became a way for women to contest their marginalized status because surfing with a large group of women meant they could physically occupy the space. Women in the surf club reported feeling empowered over time, so even though the club started as a coping mechanism, it became a mechanism of contestation when they interacted with male surfers outside the club. (ibid.)

Consequently, setting up a women’s surf club might offer “empowering” potential, where women could gain more ‘power with’ (Rowlands 1997: 13). However, at time of research, the women have not put their ideas into practice yet. In this regard, it is assumed that a lack of leadership and the already mentioned restricting structures prevent them from practising their collective agency. Another idea on how they want to “push” women’s surfing is making friends with more female surf tourists and asking them for surf guiding. However, in this case, they would be dependent on others again. In addition, many interviewees mention that they want to support the kids’ surf lessons from STN and teach their daughters or sons how to surf.

Furthermore, also some interviewees with an urban background have ideas for initiatives in order to support women’s surfing – especially for women from rural communities. For example, Sanduni mentions that she wanted to give free surf lessons for local girls in her village in the South. However, she stopped pursuing that idea because she had the feeling she could not do it alone. Nevertheless, after hearing about other initiatives, such as *GIRLS MAKE WAVES* or the *KIDS SURF CLUB MEDDAWATTA*, she reports that she feels motivated to follow up on her idea again (Interview 4). Another example is Abi, who used to be a swim coach in Norway. She has the idea to give free swimming lessons to local women, as most of them cannot swim properly (Interview 11). These examples illustrate that all interviewees want to actively support women’s surfing. However, at time of research, their ideas were not put into action yet.

6.3.4 Summary

Ever since the women, particularly the participants from the GIRLS MAKE WAVES programme, started surfing, they have spent more time together and have developed a group identity through sharing the same passion and concerns (Rowlands 1997: 115ff.). Subsequently, this created a sense of sisterhood (hooks 1986), as they share a common vision of a more equal future for women's surfing in Sri Lanka. In order to become more independent from Surfing and Development programmes, they want to create their own women's surf club – a safe space in which they can support each other, help each other improve their surfing skills, and eventually pass on their knowledge to female surf tourists while giving them surf lessons. As shown in literature, an all-women surf club might have the potential to create a space where they can unite over womanhood and improve their abilities while developing a feeling of “empowerment” (Comley 2016). However, the women surfers have not yet put their ideas into practice; their collective agency seems to be limited due to a lack of leadership and a restrictive environment. Thus, it is concluded that empowerment on the collective level strongly depends on the structures individuals find themselves in.

Nevertheless, in the past, the women surfers from Arugam Bay have already shown that through ‘power with’, they can negotiate their interests better than they could on their own. For example, it is suggested that the “take off” of women's surfing in Arugam Bay in 2015 was only possible because they started together as a group, which contributed to a collective feeling of “We can” (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 7). In addition, through encountering resistance against women's surfing, the female surfers have gained more knowledge about their rights and have developed the ability to “speak about” and “speak for themselves”, which is related to political empowerment (Eyben et al. 2008: 15). In the future, the women surfers from Arugam Bay want to collectively “fight for their right to surf”. The first steps towards more equality in women's surfing were already made, as “seeing is one step closer to being” (UN Women 2018). In this regard, local role models are an important driving force, as they show that other possibilities exist and hence enable a “shift of consciousness” (Cornwall/Edwards 2014).

6.4 Community Level

According to Malhotra et al. (2002), at the community level, “institutional and normative structures such as family systems, infrastructure, gender ideologies, regional or local market processes [...] are most likely to affect women’s empowerment.” Hence, the community level represents the structures in which women’s empowerment takes place. In the following, the community level is examined regarding the *socio-cultural* and *economic* sphere, whereas the *political* sphere is not analysed separately. In theory, women’s empowerment on a political level refers to an increase of equal participation in the democratic process as well as representation in political institutions. In this regard, surfing did not show any impact in this study. Nevertheless, the women surfers have developed greater knowledge about their rights as women and have enhanced their ability to “speak about” and “speak for themselves” (Eyben et al. 2008: 15), which has already been stated at the collective level.

At the community level, surfing has the potential for extensive transformations, particularly through the influence of surf *tourism*. In Arugam Bay, surf tourism has brought several changes to the community, in terms of both culture and economy. In terms of infrastructure, too, the town has developed rapidly, and new roads and buildings are sprouting up every year. As in every country, surf tourism can bring both positive and negative effects to Arugam Bay, and with the future in mind, it is important to develop surf tourism in a “sustainable” manner; this will ensure that the host community benefits, and not only investors and tourists from the Global North. Nonetheless, in this thesis, the focus lies on the impact of surfing as a sport, and consequently, the impact of surf tourism cannot be discussed in detail.

6.4.1 Socio-Cultural Sphere: Contesting Gender Norms and Roles

According to Eyben et al. (2009: 8), social empowerment is about “taking steps to change society so that one’s own place within it is respected and recognised on the terms on which the person themselves want to live, not on terms dictated by others”. This implies a shift of unequal social power relations and a re-definition of discriminating socio-cultural norms and practices (Luttrell/Quiroz 2009: 1). This level overlaps with the relational sphere, whereas in this chapter, emphasis is put on the potential of surfing to contest gender roles “in ways which extend the women’s possibilities for being and doing” (Mosedale 2005: 252). In what follows, it is argued

that the Sri Lankan women surfers have initiated processes of socio-cultural empowerment by contesting traditional gender norms and constructions of femininity.

Participation in a male-dominated sport

In contrast to long-established and popular sports like cricket or volleyball, surfing is a rather young and unknown sport in Sri Lanka, and many local people who did not grow up in a surfer town like Arugam Bay are not even aware that surfing is possible in their country. Considering that in Sri Lanka, only a small percentage of local women regularly participate in sports in general (Nanayakkara 2011), a female surfer from Sri Lanka is a very unusual phenomenon. This becomes even clearer when taking into account that surfing is a male domain among locals. It is estimated that in Sri Lanka, women surfers make up less than 5% of all local surfers. Therefore, all women surfers from Sri Lanka are already challenging cultural gender stereotypes by “simply” participating in a sport unheard of for women in their country. In agreement with Comley, it is suggested that “surfing can be a medium through which women can challenge dominant cultural beliefs about gender” (2016: 1292).

In the literature, it is suggested that women who participate in male-dominated sports challenge gender stereotypes about their physical abilities and prescribed roles in society, and can re-define traditional concepts of femininity by portraying the women in a “strong” way (UN Women 2007: 12). Likewise, it is argued that the women surfers from Sri Lanka re-define what local women are capable of because they contest culturally entrenched stereotypes, such as that Sri Lankan women are “weak”, “afraid of the ocean” or “only in the home”. Similarly, Britton (2017: 799) states that the women surfers from Iran challenge gender norms and draw attention to new possibilities for women. In regard to women’s empowerment, contesting cultural stereotypes plays an important role, because stereotypes affect how women perceive and treat themselves, and how they are perceived and treated by others. When women regard themselves as “strong” and begin to identify new possibilities for themselves, this shift of consciousness can enable other kinds of positive changes and collective action (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 6-18).

The challenging of gender norms can also bring disempowering consequences, however. As suggested in feminist literature, questioning and transforming traditional gender roles can lead to intolerance, irritation and resistance from other members of the community (Butler 1999; Kugelmann 2007). In this regard, Meier and Saavedra (2009) even suggest that Sport for

Development-initiatives can cause more harm than good, as those who are about to lose power can strongly resist women's empowerment. An extreme example is the murder of South African female footballer Eudy Simelane, who was gang raped and stabbed to death for breaking gender norms. In Arugam Bay, the women surfers did not report being threatened with these extreme forms of oppression; however, did report encountering significant resistance to women's surfing and empowerment. As already mentioned, though the interviewees are mostly supported by their family members and friends, many people from the wider community or outsiders do not tolerate their participation in surfing. This resistance seems to stem from the fear of a change of the current gender order and cultural norms. As Tiffany Carothers from STN states: "Surfing is not the norm for a woman. It is not the acceptable sport for a woman. It is unheard of in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, anything outside of the norm for this culture, is going to be unacceptable. Pushing these boundaries is huge." (Carothers, Interview 16) Similarly, one female surfer articulates that some men are frightened that women could gain more power through surfing:

It has always been the men who surf. So, I feel like it is just almost a normal form of sexism, where they are just threatened by the other sex to get a bit more power. And in Sri Lanka it is established that the men do this and the women do this. The men don't cook, the men don't wash clothes. They are considered like these gods that earn money and then the women do everything for them. So, there are certain things women just don't do. But I feel like because surfing gives you that strength, maybe it does kind of intimidate the men.

These insights are borne out by the case study of Jeanes and Magee regarding the experiences of female Zambian footballers. They argue that even though the sportswomen changed cultural expectations and were able to play football, the underlying power structures remained unaltered. As they point out: "To an outsider, women are participating [in football] and doing so regularly, hence they are questioning patriarchal structures. However, the young women's accounts have illustrated, this participation is contested and negotiated within the confines of more repressive gender ideals" (2014: 150). Similarly, it is concluded that in Arugam Bay, women's surfing takes places *within* current gender ideologies rather than by re-shaping them.

Visibility in the public sphere

Another key indicator for socio-cultural empowerment is an increase in women's freedom of movement and participation in public life (Malhotra et al. 2002: 13). Even though the interviewees have more freedom of movement than the Muslim women in the Arugam Bay region, the interviewees from rural backgrounds are usually restricted from moving freely in the public space. The unmarried women, in particular, are usually not allowed to go anywhere by themselves. For example, one woman works outside her home, but after finishing work, she

is expected to return home straight away, accompanied by a female work colleague. All women report that when SURFING THE NATIONS came to Arugam Bay, they started to go outside their homes more often, participating in the community activities and the GIRLS MAKE WAVES-lessons. Hence, the female surfers gradually conquer new places and increase women's visibility in the public sphere. Surfing provides them with an alternative avenue to participate in the community life, and gives them the opportunity to acquire networks outside their homes, which is clearly related to socio-cultural processes of empowerment (UN Women 2007: 3; Eyben et al. 2008: 8; Malhotra et al. 2002: 13). However, it was not observed that the women could transfer their expanded freedom of movement to other situations beyond the surfing context.

The women's increased visibility in public places also brings negative effects. Some local men dislike the fact that through surfing, the women have more opportunities to interact with other men, particularly foreigners. As a counter-reaction, the local men tend to make mean comments to the women surfers or spread rumours about them. The women surfers who surf together with their male friends, particularly, report a considerable amount of hassling. For example, they were accused of being prostitutes by random local men, or had to endure suggestive comments like "How much are you charging for the night?" or "Are we not good enough for you?" One of the women reports that people even spoke ill of her when she was surfing with her brother. As a consequence, she stopped going surfing with him, as she did not want people to spread rumours about him. These examples show that surfing can also lead to disempowering practices, where men try to maintain their 'power over' by harassing and discrediting the women surfers. Consequently, the women feel sad and discouraged, and sometimes they prefer staying at home in order to avoid getting verbally assaulted. One woman mentions that when her spirits are low in general, she prefers to stay at home, because she does not feel like dealing with the harassment she might receive. In this sense, women's empowerment is limited, as the female surfers "cannot maximise the opportunities available to them without constraint" (Rowlands 1997: 13).

The female body as contested terrain

In sport sociology, it is argued that the female body "is a location for debate about the changing nature of ideology, power, social structures and cultural systems." (Nanayakkara 2012: 1887) Similarly, a study about female surfers from Brazil suggests that the bodies of women surfers have always been a "contested terrain" (Knijnik et al. 2010: 1170). In this thesis, too, the female

body is identified as sphere, where gender norms are negotiated. According to the interviewees, there is high pressure from Sri Lankan society to behave in a certain way. The following section examines whether the women surfers conform to or contest cultural concepts of femininity in terms of fashion and beauty.

Regarding their clothes, the women surfers from rural communities are expected to dress more modestly and conservatively than the women with urban backgrounds, both on land as well as in the water. The interviewees from Arugam Bay all belong to the Tamil or Sinhalese cultures, but grew up in a Muslim-dominated environment. In contrast to the Muslim women in the area, none of the interviewees wears a hijab or fully covers her body. Nevertheless, it is important for them to dress in a modest way and therefore they usually cover their shoulders and knees. This also holds true for surfing, during which they prefer to wear surf leggings and t-shirts. Some of the women, especially the young girls who join the SURF & SWIM lessons, do not own adequate surf apparel and hence surf in their normal clothes, such as in a dress or even denim jeans. Most interviewees explain that they have not gotten any negative reactions for surfing in t-shirts and leggings. They think their surf outfits are not a problem or “against their culture”, referring to the Tamil and Sinhalese culture. Only one woman reports that some people occasionally make nasty comments to her; for example, they tell her that she looks “sexy”, which makes her feel uncomfortable.

In the interviews, many women surfers tend to *emphasize* that they do not have the intention of surfing in a bikini one day. They highlight that they want to “respect their culture” and keep up their values. This is again reminiscent of the study of Jeanes and Magee, who argue that the female Zambian soccer players “sought to emphasize traditional femininity away from football” (2014: 145). In rural areas like Arugam Bay, femininity is related to body modesty, and the Tamil and Sinhalese interviewees want to conform to this norm, emphasizing that Sri Lankan women “should protect themselves” against the eyes of other men.

This stands in contrast to the women who were raised abroad or in Colombo. In the places they grew up, they were not usually expected to dress conservatively, and hence they like to wear short clothes or to surf in bikinis, like most female surf tourists from the Global North. However, when they wear bikinis in a more conservative area such as Arugam Bay, some get a lot of negative reactions from locals, as it is considered inappropriate for local women to reveal their bodies so openly. Consequently, the women have to deal with regular harassment; for example,

male beach goers regularly tell them to cover up. Furthermore, some women mention that even their male surfer friends occasionally ask them to dress “more locally” when they go surfing together, as they want to avoid potential conflicts with other men.

Hence, the women surfers must constantly weigh to which extent they want to conform to or contest socio-cultural gender norms. In general, they feel more comfortable surfing in bikinis, but in order to avoid conflicts, they sometimes conform to societal expectations and dress more conservatively, particularly in less touristy places. Of interest is a study about female surfers from Morocco. It concludes that the women contest the established gender order, as they wear wetsuits or swimsuit that reveal their body and its shape, which challenges cultural and religious gender norms of body modesty (Guibert/Arab 2017: 162). Consequently, many women surfers from Morocco also have to deal with negative reactions by some other people. In the study, it is argued that “the very act of going surfing ultimately means breaking with feminine morality and the normal body conventions applied in Morocco” (ibid.: 167). These examples illustrate that power relations and ideologies are negotiated over the female body (Nanayakkara 2012).

Apart from clothing, the women are also confronted with society’s expectations to maintain fair skin. In Sri Lanka, as in many South Asian countries, white or fair skin is generally considered to be more attractive than dark skin. This stems from the culturally entrenched belief that fair skin is connected to beauty, wealth and superiority (Shankar/Subish 2007). Some interviewees report that their families or husbands are concerned they will get darker skin through surfing. As Sanduni outlines:

The only thing my mother was concerned about surfing was that I was getting super dark. And locals, especially local women, they like to be white. They don’t wanna be dark because dark apparently means not attractive or you won’t find a husband or whatever. (Sanduni, Interview 4)

Still, none of the interviewees are totally forbidden to surf by their family because of concerns about their skin. Most interviewees report that they personally do not care very much about their skin colour, though some of them conform to the beauty ideal to a certain extent, as they do not want to get “too dark” and therefore avoid surfing around midday. This correlates with the experiences of other surfer girls in Asia. For example, Indian surfer Ishita Malaviya reports that she was told many times by other people, “you will get tanned and dark and no one will look at you if you spend so much time on the beach” (Pandey 2014). Echoing this, Lizzie Murray from *A LIQUID FUTURE* reports that the desire to maintain fair skin can be a barrier for participating in surfing. However, she thinks this barrier is more significant among girls from

the middle-class. In the very poor communities where she works, skin colour does not particularly matter, as the women tend to be dark from their work on the fields anyway (Interview 1).

Socio-cultural impacts of surf tourism

Furthermore, it is argued that through surf *tourism*, cultural assumptions of femininity and masculinity are contested and re-defined, as coastal communities are inevitably confronted with the life concepts of international surf tourists. Through tourism, locals in Arugam Bay are exposed to other cultures, mostly from Europe, Australia and Israel, which might influence their perceptions of cultural gender roles. For example, some of the younger interviewees in particular became friends with female tourists from the Global North, and they learned from each other, enriching their perspectives on what it means to be a woman. Consequently, some women get inspired and develop new ideas; for instance, some of the younger women now wish to travel to other countries one day. However, the women surfers from Arugam Bay also tend to emphasize that they want to maintain their own values. They consider it important, for example, to always “protect themselves”, and they would have no interest in joining Western surf tourists at beach parties.

This cross-cultural exchange refers not only to the women surfers, but to the community as a whole. For example, a male surf instructor mentions in an informal chat that his personality changed a lot through meeting Western surf tourists. He explains that he is “not the same person anymore” and attempts to “combine the best from both cultures”. For example, he now questions why Sri Lankan women are culturally expected to stay in their homes, whereas the tourist women can move around freely. This study does not attempt to discern how surfing and surf tourism has changed the men’s perspectives towards women or towards cultural gender norms; however, it would be interesting for further research to examine the men’s perspectives and their understandings of masculinity and femininity, especially given the consideration that women’s empowerment is a relational process that needs the support of men to be substantial and sustainable (Rowlands 1997: 132).

Finally, a negative example of Western influence through surf tourism is provided, in order to further illustrate how tourism can transform the structures in which women’s empowerment takes place. This refers to the development of a beach boy-culture, which is becoming increasingly common in Arugam Bay, and even more so in the southwest of Sri Lanka

(Ranasinghe 2017). In many informal conversations during my three-month stay, people mentioned that surf tourism has caused some local men to become increasingly addicted to alcohol and drugs. Whereas surf tourists come to Sri Lanka and party during their limited holidays, for the beach boys the party never stops, and they gradually become addicted and get stuck in a vicious cycle. In contrast, the local women from Arugam Bay never go to parties, but they are also affected by the beach boy culture, as the men's increasing abuse of drugs and alcohol may contribute to more aggressive behaviour and an increase in gender-based violence, which is a problem throughout Sri Lanka (Herath 2015: 8; Darj et al. 2016). This topic was not examined in more detail in this study, but it is important to reflect that surf tourism can also bring negative consequences to communities.

6.4.2 Economic Sphere: Gaining an Income in the Surf Tourism Sector

Economic empowerment means that people – in this case women – can think beyond satisfying their immediate survival needs, and thereby practice their agency and choice. Indicators include, for example, access to employment or control over one's income (Eyben et al. 2008; Malhotra et al. 2002). In this regard, it is argued that surfing as *tourism* can contribute to empowerment by providing jobs and business opportunities in the surf tourism sector; however, it always depends on the specific context, as empowerment is certainly not a “simple act of transformation by a transfer of money” (Porter 2014: 4). Similarly, Lizzie Murray articulates that surfing has potential for empowerment on a functional level, because the possession of surf skills, water knowledge or environmental awareness may lead to job opportunities in the sport, tourism or environmental sectors. This potential depends on how surf tourism is regulated, however (Interview 1).

In the Global South, surf tourism is on the rise, and it has the opportunity to contribute to economic growth in coastal communities worldwide. However, surf tourism is a double-edged sword (see Usher/Kerstetter 2014), and if it happens without proper regulation, it can bring more harm than good to host communities. In academic literature, it is strongly emphasized that surf tourism can have negative social, environmental and economic impacts, and many surf scholars have used the term (neo-)colonial to “identify the tendency for wealth to accumulate among foreign business owners in surf destinations to the detriment of local communities” (Ruttenberg/Brosius 2017: n.p.). As Ponting et al. (2005: 152f.) articulate:

[...] surfing tourism has a history as a colonizing activity. Surfers tend to venture into areas previously unvisited by mainstream tourists, opening up new routes and new systems of development – surfing tourism has nudged unprepared destinations down the slippery slope to large scale industrialized tourism and its related issues.

In the transdisciplinary field of Surf Studies, surf tourism is one of the main research areas and much has been written about surfing and its potential for economic or sustainable development. In what follows, it is briefly illustrated how the interviewees (with emphasis on the women from working-class families from Arugam Bay) might benefit from surf tourism, in relation to their economic empowerment. In Arugam Bay, the local economy used to be dominated by traditional fishing; in recent decades, however, surf tourism has been growing rapidly and has provided many new jobs to the community. Whereas in the past men generally worked as fishermen, they now work in the tourism sector, for example as surf instructors, shop owners or hotel managers. According to Krishanta Ariyasena, president of the ARUGAM BAY SURF CLUB, it is the club's goal to "protect the local income". This is why foreigners are not allowed to work as surf instructors in Arugam Bay, for instance (Interview 3).

According to the interviewees, surf tourism has brought wealth to Arugam Bay, and most of their brothers, fathers or husbands generate their income through tourism during the surf season. Indeed, it is not only the men who work in surf tourism; women, too, are integrated into the industry, though they make up only a fraction compared to the men. Some interviewees report that since the tsunami in 2004, women have increasingly started working outside their homes as every possibility for assistance was needed that time. For example, Gayesha reports that she was the first woman from her village to get a job in a hotel, where she worked in an internet café (Interview 14). Still, at time of research, local women were clearly under-represented in the formal workforce, and most of them seemed to work in the "background", in the invisible part, of the tourism industry, for example as cleaners or kitchen hands. Based on personal observations during the three-month field trip, it can be said that the majority of workers in restaurants, cafés, surf shops, hotels or tuk-tuk transportation in Arugam Bay were men.

Nevertheless, many women surfers who were interviewed had a job outside their homes that exposed them to tourists (a fact which suggests over-representation compared to the overall female population of Arugam Bay). For instance, they worked as baristas, shop assistants, nannies or massage therapists – varieties of job that were only created because of surf tourism. The married interviewees did not have a job outside their homes, but most of them gained some extra income, for example by doing laundry at their houses or renting cabanas or extra rooms

on their properties to tourists. One woman also ran her own small restaurant together with her husband. Some interviewees mention that they are glad to have work and it makes them feel strong, self-confident and independent. For example, Susanthika explains that some people wanted to tell her what she should do with her money, but she did not listen to them:

I have been fighting with a lot of guys here. I told them, it is my money and I am working hard for it. And I am getting money and I can choose what I want to spend my money for. I can buy make-up or I can put on lipstick, it is not your business. (Susanthika, Interview 10)

In this sense, obtaining their own income made the women feel empowered. However, some interviewees articulate that despite the fact they “work hard”, they only have a small salary. They are dependent on the “good will” of their employers, which illustrates that their empowerment on an economic level is limited, when it is considered as ability to “negotiate fairer distribution of the benefits of growth” (Eyben et al. 2008: 9f.). Hence, having an income does not automatically lead to women’s empowerment – it is also crucial to obtain skills, know-how and resources in order to influence the economic structures (Porter 2013).

It is suggested that women starting their *own* business might have a higher impact on economic empowerment. Some married women, particularly, articulate that they would like to start their own business in the future, such as by giving cooking lessons or building cabanas. However, most of them did not yet possess the necessary financial resources or skills to put their ideas into practice. This is similar for the establishment of the women’s surf club, which could provide them with an income if they managed to give surf lessons to female tourists. Many interviewees think that their business idea could bring them “good money”, and they would be interested in becoming a surf instructor themselves one day. Nimali also relates this idea to women’s empowerment, as they would gain equality in the water:

So, when we are getting better and start teaching other people, we will have equality, minimum in the water. That we will be equal to men. And that we can also teach someone surfing. So, we will be equal to them, when teaching each other. (Nimali, Interview 18)

Elaborating on this point, Asheni argues that there is also a growing demand for female surf instructors. Her parents run one of the biggest hotels in Arugam Bay, and many of their female guests regularly request female surf teachers. However, there is not one women instructor in the village, as foreigners are not allowed to work as instructors and the local women have not gained the required surf skills yet. She also mentions that she would have taken surf lessons from a female instructor if she had had the chance, as then they could have talked about “these extra problems that you can get in the water” (Interview 2). Similarly, Krishanta Ariyasena,

who works as a surf instructor himself, thinks that female tourists would be interested in the idea as they might feel more comfortable around another woman (Interview 3). Furthermore, one expat, who is involved in the surf tourism industry, states in an informal conversation that Sri Lanka tries to market the country as a “women-friendly surfing destination”, as the waves are more mellow and adequate for beginner surfers. The point is not to discuss whether this marketing strategy might be sexist, but merely to state that whatever attracts more women tourists would cause a corresponding increase in demand for female surf instructors. If women were more integrated into the sport of surfing and the surf tourism sector, it might also lead to more “sustainable development” on the community level. Highlighting this, Lizzie Murray points out the urgent need for women’s integration into the development of surf tourism:

Surfing has a huge responsibility to put the right foot forward that it could. For tourism to be developed sustainably, towards sustainability at least, you have to have gender empowerment. Because if you only have male tourists visiting a place that is run mostly by the male sector of society, I think we are more likely to see what happened in Bali. Whereas if you have women tourists visiting that areas as well and families and couples and you have women from the local community working within the industry too, I think you gonna have a far more balanced and sustainable model of tourism than otherwise. (Murray, Interview 1)

The importance of integrating local women into *surf* tourism for sustainable development is not well-explored in academia, but might be interesting for further research.

6.4.3 Summary

At the community level in Arugam Bay, surfing has contributed to women’s empowerment in the socio-cultural and economic spheres. In regard to *socio-cultural* empowerment, surfing has the potential to “extend the women’s possibilities for being and doing” (Mosedale 2005: 252), as the female surfers re-shape traditional gender roles and constructions of femininity. They do this by participating in a male-dominated sport, entering the public space and contesting cultural norms regarding the body, fashion or beauty. Through surfing, the women perceive themselves as “strong” and challenge culturally entrenched stereotypes. As the women begin to see the other possibilities that are open to them, this shift of consciousness might enable other kinds of changes (Cornwall/Edwards 2014: 6-18).

The process of questioning traditional gender roles can also have disempowering effects, however, as it can lead to intolerance, irritation and resistance from the wider community (Butler 1999). The surfers’ bodies are a particularly contested terrain, as ideologies and power relations are negotiated over the female body (Knijnik et al. 2010: 1170; Nanayakkara 2012:

1887). In Arugam Bay, the female surfers are not confronted with extreme forms of oppression; however, they encounter a lot of resistance against women's surfing from some local men, who seem to feel threatened about a change to the current gender order. Consequently, some men try to belittle the women and to harass them, mostly by making negative comments. Thus, surfing takes place "within the confines of more repressive gender ideals" (Jeanes/Magee 2014: 150), and the women surfers must constantly weigh whether the prize of contesting gender norms is worth it, or if they prefer conforming to them in order to avoid negative consequences.

Furthermore, surfing as a form of *tourism* brought extensive changes to Arugam Bay, both culturally and economically. Through surf tourism, coastal communities are inevitably confronted with the lifestyles and gender roles of international tourists from the Global North, which can influence local assumptions about masculinity and femininity – both positive and negative. A negative example of the influence of Western surf tourists is the evolution of the beach boy culture. Local men are becoming increasingly addicted to drugs and alcohol, which might lead to an increase in gender-based violence, a widespread issue in Sri Lanka (Herath 2015: 8).

In terms of *economic* empowerment, surf tourism can contribute to economic growth and an increase in wealth for coastal communities. Surf tourism is a double-edged sword, however, and can also bring negative impacts, such as destroying local economies and the environment (a possibility not examined in this thesis). In terms of women's empowerment, surf tourism has brought new opportunities for women to join the formal workforce in Arugam Bay. Many interviewees are employed in the surf tourism industry, mostly in hospitality, which makes them feel independent and "strong". Nevertheless, they are limited to negotiate the conditions in which they are working, and therefore the impact of gaining an income is limited in regard to women's empowerment (Eyben et al. 2008: 9f.). This illustrates that empowerment cannot be reduced to a "simple act of transformation by a transfer of money" (Porter 2014: 4). It is suggested that setting up their own business, such as the women's surf club and school, might have a higher impact for economic empowerment by leading to a "fairer distribution of the benefits of growth" (Eyben et al. 2008: 10).

7. Conclusion

In this final chapter, I discuss and summarize the empirical results, by bringing the multi-dimensional impacts of surfing together and by providing a summary about the *overall* potentials and limitations of surfing for women's empowerment in the Global South. Furthermore, I outline the limitations of the present study, discuss its implications for Surfing and Development programmes and policy making, and offer suggestions for further research.

7.1 Discussion and Summary

Based on the analysis of the empirical results, it is argued that surfing can indeed contribute to women's empowerment in many regards. Surfing is, however, by no means a miracle cure for transforming gender inequalities. The present case study reinforces the argument made by Britton, who concluded that "although there is great potential for positive change through surfing, it is merely the tool, not the antidote to the pressing social issues of our age" (2017: 797). What differentiates this work from Britton's case study about women's surfing in Iran is that women's empowerment is regarded as a *multi-dimensional* process, which can take place on the personal, relational, collective and community level, and refers to an increase of 'power from within', 'power to', 'power with' and 'power over' (Rowlands 1997). Furthermore, the focus lies squarely on the personal perspectives and experiences of the female surfers from Sri Lanka, and relies less on insights from representatives of Surfing and Development programmes. The perspectives of these women surfers can enrich the Sport for Development discourse; the voices of participants of SFD programmes in the Global South have often been neglected, and critical scholars increasingly emphasize the need to decolonize the discourse by integrating participants' points of view (Jeanes/Magee 2014).

So, what kind of changes have the women surfers from Sri Lanka experienced since they started surfing? How can surfing contribute to women's empowerment, according to the perspectives of female surfers from Sri Lanka? In what follows, the empirical results are briefly summarized with regard to the impact of surfing on the different levels of women's empowerment. A general conclusion and appraisal is then reached.

The experiences of the women surfers from Sri Lanka have shown that surfing can contribute to women's empowerment on a *personal level*, by expanding their horizons of possibility; by increasing their self-confidence and courage; by allowing them to develop more trust in themselves and to overcome fears; by deepening their relationship with the ocean; and by improving mental as well as physical well-being. The ocean can provide a space in which to feel "free", and to escape momentarily from personal problems or daily routines. These changes are related to the women's '*power from within*', and together they comprise a "shift of consciousness". By participating in a sport that is considered to be "tough" and "difficult", the women expand their estimates of what they are capable of, and begin to perceive themselves as "strong". Moreover, surfing can contribute to an expansion of '*power to*' by allowing the women to develop new skills. The skills they learn are both functional "hard" skills, as in the case of swimming and ocean awareness, or "soft" skills like discipline and goal-setting.

At the *relational level*, surfing can contribute to women's empowerment by strengthening their individual decision-making; increasing their negotiation and communication skills; earning them respect from others; and fostering a connection between fellow surfers, regardless of gender, socio-economic status or cultural background. The ocean can act as a "great leveller of human nature" (Murray, Interview 1), because being collectively at the mercy of an elemental force can help people transcend the boundaries that divide them on land. As the ocean does not distinguish between people, women surfers who grew up in a repressive environment might be able to undo their "internalized oppression" and realize that "everyone is equal", a process which is connected to '*power from within*'.

On the *collective level*, surfing can contribute to the development of a group identity and a sense of sisterhood, as female surfers share the same passions and tend to bond over their shared womanhood. In this case study, all women surfers expressed the wish for further equality in the water as well as on land, and their resulting sense of collective purpose – the feeling of "We can" – is closely linked to the development of '*power with*'. They were already beginning to negotiate their interests as a unified group. In Arugam Bay, the female surfers are aware of their rights and want to "fight for them", which is an indicator of *political* empowerment. Previous developments have already shown that the women surfers can make a bigger impact together than they can on their own. It is even probable that the take-off in women's surfing in 2015 was only possible because the women did it together as a group, rather than a single woman deciding to forge a path and stand out of the crowd.

At the *community level*, surfing can contribute to *socio-cultural* empowerment, as it shows the women new possibilities of being and acting. By participating in a male-dominated sport and doing so in a public place, the women contest traditional gender roles. Furthermore, they reshape constructions of femininity, as they challenge cultural norms regarding the body, fashion and beauty. Questioning cultural conceptions of femininity and transforming gender roles, however, can also bring disempowering consequences, because it can lead to intolerance, irritation and resistance. Therefore, the women surfers from Sri Lanka must deal with regular resistance and harassment from the wider community, especially from local men. This resistance is also confirmed by other studies in the Sport for Development discourse; for instance, a study about the experiences of Moroccan women surfers shows that some of them are regularly insulted for contesting gender norms (Guibert/Arab 2017). In this regard, the body of the women's surfers is a particularly contested terrain, where gender ideologies and power relations are negotiated.

In general, surf *tourism* is a double-edged sword and can bring positive as well as negative changes to coastal communities in the Global South. This impact, in turn, influences the structures in which women's empowerment takes place. The effects of surf tourism, however, were not examined in detail in this thesis. In terms of *economic* empowerment in relation to women, surf tourism can contribute to new job opportunities for women. Evidence of this can be found in the fact that many of the interviewed female surfers from Sri Lanka work in the surf tourism industry, and report that obtaining their own income makes them feel "empowered" and independent. Nevertheless, the impact of surf tourism on economic empowerment is limited, as the women are still dependent on the "good will" of their employers.

It remains necessary to consider all these levels together, in relation to each other. As this case study has shown, surfing can contribute to an increase of *power from within*, *power to* and *power with*. It promotes positive psychological changes, in which the women surfers experience a "shift of consciousness" and begin to identify new possibilities, which is the core of women's empowerment. Moreover, the development of *power with* is the starting point for collective action. Consequently, it might be assumed that this expansion in generative power will also lead to a corresponding increase in agency, which is the "ability to define one's goals and act upon them" (Kabeer 2001: 21). In this case, however, the women's agency is limited beyond the sport context, because they find themselves in repressive patriarchal structures back on land, and surfing does not change these structures. On the contrary, surfing takes place *within* existing

structures, which lends weight to the common argument in sport sociology that sport is a “microcosm of society” (Weiß 1990) and reflects underlying societal power relations.

This case study has also shown that many women surfers from Sri Lanka are frequently hindered from surfing by socio-cultural, economic and institutionalized constraints. This is particularly true of the surfers with rural and working-class backgrounds, illustrating the importance of considering intersectionality in gender analysis. Therefore, if empowerment is defined as process by which women “are able to maximise the opportunities available to them without constraint” (Rowlands 1997: 13), the impact of surfing is limited. Nevertheless, the women have gained ‘*power over*’ to a certain extent, as they gradually conquer the public space and transform gender relations in the water. The very restrictions that hold the women back can act as a springboard for women’s empowerment, as the female surfers begin to comprehend their oppression and refuse to accept unfair male privileges as “normal” any longer. Consequently, the women surfers begin to consider ways to negotiate their constraints, which can in turn promote a sense of ‘sisterhood’ and collective action.

Based on these insights, it is concluded that surfing happens *within* existing power structures and relations, rather than re-shaping them. Surfing is limited in its immediate power to change long-established socio-cultural norms and gender inequalities, such as relational decision-making on the household level, where Sri Lankan women from rural areas in particular are expected to be obedient to their parents or to men. Surfing might contribute to realization of one’s own interests, but it does not expand the women’s ability to make their own choices – at least not on land. Nevertheless, surfing might contribute to a slow transformation of structures, as a “shift of consciousness” is the first step forward.

In addition, it is argued that for women’s empowerment to be substantial and sustainable, it is necessary for the attitudes and the behaviour of *men* to change. The local men, especially the ones who seem to be afraid of a shift in the current gender hierarchy, must be willing to use less of their ‘*power over*’, and to explore new roles. As feminist scholars have argued, this can actually be an *opportunity* for men. With women’s empowerment and gender equality, men could shed the image of being an “oppressor” and could live in a more equal society, in which everyone can reach their fullest potential. In this regard, the local male surfers could play a key role, as the findings of this study illustrate that many male surfers are also hopeful that more Sri Lankan women might engage in surfing. These male surfers could step forward to help

“create an environment where the use of power in other forms becomes more possible” (Rowlands 1997: 132). But the women surfers regard themselves as change agents, and want to pave the way for the next generation. In this regard, the intermediate surfers play an especially important role, as they can act as local role models and leaders. Furthermore, the women surfers from rural backgrounds aspire to overcome their dependency on others in terms of surfing, and want to push women’s surfing by creating a women’s surf club; however, these impacts lie in the future.

Surfing is not a panacea for achieving gender equality, but it can be a powerful vehicle for enabling women’s empowerment. Female surfers from emerging surf cultures in the Global South are challenging the status quo; they are “making waves”. For the female surfers from Sri Lanka, participating in the sport of surfing has increased their generative power, and in combination with structural changes that surf tourism might bring, surfing is considered a “hidden pathway” for women’s empowerment and gender equality. It is important not to romanticize or exaggerate the potential of surfing, however, and to recall that the process of challenging the current gender order can also lead to resistance and disempowering practices. In addition, empowerment always happens within a specific context. What might be empowering for one woman will not necessarily be empowering for another. Nevertheless, it is argued that surfing can open “a space of possibility, a space that didn’t exist before.” (Britton 2017: 803) Or to conclude with the words of a pioneering female surfer from Sri Lanka:

I think surfing can open up to many things. [...] Once they [other Sri Lankan women] have started surfing, I can see how they will grow in terms of the way they think. And then, the way they act. I feel like, surfing would open up. Would make them stand up for themselves. [...] But it’s just taking that first step. And letting them know that ‘You know what, it’s okay if you surf.’ And once you do, it’s all gonna go uphill.

7.2 Reflections, Outlook and Recommendations

It needs to be remembered that this is a *case study*, which took place in a very specific context. Hence it must be emphasized that the results of this study should not be generalized. Even in reference to the region of Arugam Bay, one must acknowledge that the situation is complex: For example, Arugam Bay is a multi-cultural village with a Muslim majority, yet this thesis only considered the perspectives of female surfers from the Sinhalese and Tamil minority as no female Muslim surfers could be found at the time of research.

During my time in Arugam Bay, I gathered a lot of empirical material, far too extensive to be included as a whole into this thesis. I therefore had to decide which observations and stories I would focus on; this was in fact the main difficulty in the writing process. In the end, I could not integrate all the insights gained during my field research. For example, I gathered and analysed lots of data about the birth of women's surfing in Arugam Bay (with earliest records of local girls surfing in the 1980s), and its enabling as well as prohibiting factors. Nevertheless, due to my focus on a specific research question, I decided to emphasize how surfing can empower women, rather than pointing out in detail why many Sri Lankan women are excluded from participating in this sport. Yet these additional insights might be useful, particularly for SDOs that wish to integrate more girls and women into their surf programmes.

As this study has shown, many women surfers, particularly from rural areas, are dependent on SDOs, which provide them the safe space and material with which to learn surfing. Without their help, women are often not allowed to go surfing by their families. This situation fosters a high dependency on others, and might have negative implications. For example, some women report that surfing has become important for their mental well-being. Presumably, if they no longer have surfing in their lives, a form of disempowerment may result. In this regard, another question comes to light: Who empowers whom? It is argued that the urban women surfers found ways of self-initiated empowerment, whereas the empowerment of the rural women was externally promoted. But as argued in feminist literature, empowerment is not something that can be bestowed on others – it can only be done by the women themselves. In addition, the dependency on SDOs, or other Sport for Development programmes, might re-enforce unequal North-South relationships, which are commonly found in development co-operation. Therefore, for further studies, it would be interesting to explore the relationship between SDOs and (female) participants more closely, in order to learn how sports participants might be able to become more independent in the long run. How can female surfers become less dependent on the help of others? Under which circumstances are aspiring female surfers allowed to go surfing by their parents? What possibilities does a women's surf club offer for women's empowerment, and beyond that, for the development of sustainable tourism? These are some of the questions that must be addressed by future research.

One limitation of this thesis is that it examined surfing as form of *tourism* only briefly. This was intentional, as the explicit focus lay on surfing as a sport, and there are already numerous academic studies that deal with the impact of surf tourism on sustainable development (though

not on women's empowerment). During the analysis, some questions arose that might prove interesting for further investigations. For example, it became obvious that surfing as a form of tourism enables intercultural exchange. It would be useful to find out more about how tourism influences cultural conceptualizations of femininity and masculinity, and whether it might change the perspectives of men towards women or towards cultural gender norms. This is especially relevant given that women's empowerment is a relational process that needs the support of men.

In addition, Lizzie Murray (Interview 1) suggested that women's empowerment and gender equality are essential for the development of *sustainable* tourism, referring to her experiences in Indonesia. Likewise, in Papua New Guinea (which is often cited as best practice for sustainable surf tourism in surf literature), the integration of local women into surfing is regarded as important for positive community development (O'Brien/Ponting 2013: 169). Nevertheless, the impact of women's empowerment (through surfing) on the development of sustainable surf tourism seems to be under-explored in academia, and hence would make an interesting subject for further investigation. The outcomes of such research could prove particularly important for policy makers and tourism planners in the Global South.

As a final note, it is strongly recommended that the term "women's empowerment" be used more carefully in the Surf and Social Good discourse. In the Global South, female surfers are increasingly entering the local line-ups, and SDOs and surf journalists regularly claim that surfing can empower them. This study has demonstrated, however, that surfing is only a tool, and not a solution for gender equality, and that efforts towards women's empowerment can sometimes result in disempowering practices. Hence, a more sensitive approach to the use of "empowerment language" is called for. In addition, it is recommended that more research be conducted that reflects the perspectives of the participants of Sport for Development programmes in the Global South. Such a trend would gradually begin to decolonize the academic discourse, a task I hope I have contributed to with my thesis.

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9. Appendix

9.1 Abstract – English

In the Global South, female surfers have been increasingly entering the local surf spots in their countries in the past years – a trend which is supported by Surfing and Development organisations. These organisations provide girls and women from coastal communities with a safe space to learn surfing, and claim that the sport “empowers” them. The perspectives of the participants, however, are largely missing in the academic discourse. Therefore, this thesis aims to shed light on the personal experiences of female surfers from the Global South, embedding their perspectives into the research fields of Women’s Empowerment, Sport for Development and Surfing for Social Good. Consequently, an ethnographic research (including biographical interviews and participant observations) was conducted in the surfing town of Arugam Bay in Sri Lanka from July until October 2017. According to the perspectives of the women surfers from Sri Lanka, surfing can contribute to women’s empowerment in many regards, by increasing their ‘power from within’, ‘power to’ and ‘power with’. Surfing takes place *within* current power structures, however, rather than re-shaping them, and can also lead to disempowering practices as especially local men from the wider community react with resistance to the women surfers’ contestation of gender roles and norms. Hence, it is concluded that surfing can be a vehicle for women’s empowerment, but it is not a panacea for gender inequality, and it is recommended that “empowerment language” be used more critically, particularly in the Surfing for Social Good discourse.

9.2 Abstract – German

Die Sportart Wellenreiten gewinnt weltweit an Popularität. In den letzten Jahren ist zu beobachten, dass auch immer mehr Frauen aus dem Globalen Süden beginnen, an ihren heimischen Küsten zu surfen. Diese Entwicklung wird unterstützt von sogenannten Surfing and Development-Organisationen, die Mädchen und Frauen die Möglichkeit bieten, die Sportart in einem sicheren Umfeld zu erlernen, und welche beanspruchen, dass Surfen „empowert“. Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist herauszufinden, ob und inwiefern Wellenreiten zu Prozessen der Selbstermächtigung führen kann, wobei die Perspektiven der Surferinnen aus dem Globalen Süden selbst im Vordergrund stehen. Dafür wurde eine ethnografische Feldforschung in Arugam Bay in Sri Lanka durchgeführt (Juli bis Oktober 2017); als Methoden wurden teilnehmende Beobachtungen und biographische Interviews gewählt. Laut den Erfahrungen der Surferinnen aus Sri Lanka, kann Surfen zu Prozessen der Selbstermächtigung führen – vor allem durch die Entwicklung von „psychischer“ Macht, „individueller“ Macht und „kollektiver“ Macht. Allerdings kann Surfen auch zu „Disempowerment“ beitragen, weil durch Surfen bestehende Geschlechternormen und -verhältnisse in Frage gestellt und verändert werden, was innerhalb der Community, vor allem bei Männern, zu Reaktionen des Widerstands und Intoleranz führen kann. Deshalb wird der Schluss gezogen, dass Surfen zwar Empowerment-Prozesse initiieren kann, es aber kein „Wundermittel“ zur Gleichstellung der Geschlechter ist.

9.3 Overview Interviews

No.	Name	Interview Form	Date	Duration	Setting	Translator
1	Lizzie Murray (A Liquid Future)	Expert Interview	14/07/17	2:30h	Skype	No
2	Asheni	Biographical Interview	05/09/17	1:05h	personal	No
3	Krishanta Ariyasena (Arugam Bay Surf Club)	Expert Interview	13/09/17	1:35h	personal	No
4	Sanduni	Biographical Interview	17/09/17 19/09/17	2:27h in total	personal	No
5	Katerina Petrouskova (Surf Kids Club Meddawatta)	Expert Interview	17/09/17	1:07h	personal	No
6	Ayomi	Biographical Interview	03/10/17 14/10/17	1:24h in total	personal	Yes
7	Mandari	Biographical Interview	04/10/17	1:26h	personal	No
8	Shehara	Biographical Interview	05/10/17	2:43h	personal	No
9	Ishka	Biographical Interview	06/10/17	0:52h	personal	No
10	Susanthika	Biographical Interview	07/10/17	1:51h	personal	Yes
11	Aysha	Biographical Interview	08/10/17 12/10/17	1:35h in total	personal	No
12	Rayima	Biographical Interview	10/10/17	1:23h	personal	Yes
13	Minrada	Biographical Interview	11/10/17	2:14h	personal	No
14	Rangani and Gayesha	Biographical Interview	12/10/17	2:28h	personal	No
15	Lochani	Biographical Interview	13/10/17	1:11h	personal	Yes
16	Tiffany Carothers (Surfing the Nations)	Expert Interview	13/10/17 15/10/17	2:58h in total	personal	No
17	Dayani	Biographical Interview	14/10/17	1:47h	personal	Yes
18	Nimali	Biographical Interview	14/10/17	1:08h	personal	Yes
19	Bandhini	Biographical Interview	15/10/17	1:45h	personal	Yes
20	Nuveena	Biographical Interview	18/10/17	1:59h	personal	Yes
21	Jayani	Biographical Interview	18/11/17	1:10h	Skype	No

9.4 Overview Backgrounds Interviewees

No.	Name	Socio-economic Background		Family Status	Surf Level	Surf Context
2	Asheni	Sinhalese Grew up in Sri Lanka and Italy University in London Lives in Arugam Bay	Middle-class, Urban	Unmarried	Intermediate (started in 2015)	Independent
4	Sanduni	Sri Lankan & Swedish Grew up in Kuwait University in Colombo Lives in Weligama	Middle-class, Urban	Unmarried	Intermediate (started in 2015)	Independent
6	Ayomi	Tamil, Christian Grew up and lives in Arugam Bay	Working-class, Rural	Unmarried	Better beginner (started in 2015)	GMW
7	Mandari	Sinhalese Grew up in Colombo University in Colombo and India, Lives in Arugam Bay	Middle-class, Urban	Unmarried	Intermediate (started in 2003/2008)	Independent
8	Shehara	Sinhalese/Tamil, Christian Grew up and lives in Arugam Bay	Working-class, Rural	Married Pregnant	Intermediate (started in 2009)	Independent GMW
9	Ishka	Sinhalese, Buddhist Grew up and lives in Arugam Bay	Working-class, Rural	Unmarried	Better beginner (started in 2015)	GMW
10	Susanthika	Tamil, Christian Grew up and lives in Arugam Bay	Working-class, Rural	Unmarried	Better beginner (started in 2015)	GMW & tourist friends
11	Aysha	Tamil Grew up in Sri Lanka and Norway Lives in Arugam Bay	Middle-class, Urban	Unmarried	Better beginner (started in 2017)	Independent
12	Rayima	Tamil/Sinhalese Grew up and lives in Arugam Bay	Working-class, Rural	Married Children	Not active (surfing in 1980ies)	/
13	Minrada	Tamil, Christian Grew up and lives in Arugam Bay	Working-class, Rural	Married Children	Beginner (surfing 3 times)	GMW
14	Rangani & Gayesha	Sinhalese, Buddhist Grew up and live in Arugam Bay	Working-class, Rural	Unmarried	Not active (surfing in 2015)	GMW
15	Lochani	Sinhalese, Christian Grew up in Galle, married to Arugam Bay	Working-class, Rural	Married, Children	Beginner (surfing 3 times)	GMW
17	Dayani	Tamil, Christian Grew up and lives in Arugam Bay	Working-class, Rural	Unmarried	Better beginner (started 2015)	GMW
18	Nimali	Tamil, Christian Grew up and lives in Arugam Bay	Working-class, Rural	Unmarried	Better beginner (started 2015)	GMW
19	Bandhini	Tamil, Christian Grew up and lives in Arugam Bay	Working-class, Rural	Married Children	Beginner (surfing 3 times)	GMW
20	Nuveena	Tamil, Christian Grew up and lives in Arugam Bay	Working-class, Rural	Widow Children	Better beginner (started 2015)	GMW
21	Jayani	Tamil/Sinhalese Grew up in Arugam Bay; lives in Australia	Working-class, Rural	Married Children	Not active (surfing in 1980ies)	/