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ENLARGING THE FIELD OF CREDIBLE EXPERIENCE:
SUPPORTING YOUNG SOLOMON ISLANDERS AS AGENTS OF POSITIVE CHANGE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Development Studies at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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2012
This thesis is dedicated to:

**YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PACIFIC**
who are seeking to be the change they want to see in the world.

You are an inspiration to me.

I hope you will be seen as the strength of the region.
And I pray that you will always have someone who believes in you!

**MY MUM AND DAD**
who have always believed in me and who have sacrificed greatly for my education.

To Dad, who has spent hundreds of hours proof reading my work and who has discussed and debated with me so many aspects of my university journey.

To Mum, who always knows the right things to say and whose love and support gives me so much strength.

I am truly thankful!
This thesis explores the idea of young Solomon Islanders as agents of positive change and argues that understandings around youth agency, its expressions, and the factors that support and constrain it, should be a key feature framing youth and development. Young people are generally viewed as those between the ages of 15 and 29, and make up a growing proportion of Pacific populations. Valuing them as solutions for development, rather than as 'problems', is being increasingly promoted throughout the region. Investigations into youth agency, however, are relatively recent and there is still a great deal to be learnt about how they could be used to improve the situation for youth.

This thesis adds to these explorations by investigating the constraints and enablers for transformative youth agency in Solomon Islands, and by examining young people's articulations of agency and how they employ these in order to carve out a place of credibility for themselves in their communities and nation. A 'hopeful' post-development approach, which holds that development should validate previously subjugated practices and should prioritise assets and agency, is taken as the foundation for explorations of youth and development. Agency is then explored using a framework for investigating factors which 'thin' and 'thicken' youth agency. Fieldwork took place over five weeks in Solomon Islands in late 2011. A narrative inquiry methodological framework, guided by principles from Pacific methodologies and an actor-oriented approach, was utilised for this thesis research.

The findings of this study show that young people do face multifaceted constraints on their agency, but that they can work in spite of these when they are socially supported. The socially situated nature of youth agency is therefore highlighted, and the need for young people to be positioned within their social networks discussed. Additionally, the findings contest the negative conceptualisations held to be present around young Solomon Islanders by indicating the many ways in which they are actively contributing to their communities. The main implication of the findings, and the conclusion of the thesis, is that development policy and practice must build on understandings of young people as socially situated contributors, as well as, on the factors that constrain and enable their agency, in order to legitimise and support youth as agents of positive change.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A huge thank you to each person who participated in this research. I am so grateful for your kindness and for your willingness to *stori* with me, it made fieldwork such a rewarding experience. Each one of you is an inspiration to me! *Tagio tumas*!

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARH</td>
<td>Adolescent Reproductive Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSAID</td>
<td>Australian Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSIP</td>
<td>British Solomon Islands Protectorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRR</td>
<td>Disaster Risk Reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFAT</td>
<td>(New Zealand) Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC</td>
<td>National Youth Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ola Fou</td>
<td>Ola Fou Pasifika Youth Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OXFAM</td>
<td>Oxford Committee for Famine Relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PICs</td>
<td>Pacific Island Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAMSI</td>
<td>Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SICA</td>
<td>Solomon Islands Christian Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIG</td>
<td>Solomon Islands Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIPPA</td>
<td>Solomon Islands Planned Parenthood Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPC</td>
<td>The Secretariat of the Pacific Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEAR Fund</td>
<td>The Evangelical Alliance Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TFNZ</td>
<td>TEAR Fund New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPA</td>
<td>Townsville Peace Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWII</td>
<td>World War Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNCRC</td>
<td>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children's Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YWCA</td>
<td>Young Women's Christian Association</td>
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