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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
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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.

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ABSTRACT

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.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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