



# *Gasegase o le Mafaufau*

*a short film about Pasifika people living with dementia*

*By Luceanne Perks*



# **Gasegase o le Mafaufau<sup>1</sup>**

A short film about Pasifika people living with dementia

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<sup>1</sup> Illness of the Mind (Samoan)

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A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design.

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Bachelor of Design, Auckland University of Technology, 2023

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## **Abstract**

This practice-led research project explores dementia from an Aotearoa New Zealand Pasifika perspective, advancing empathy and understanding towards the condition. By drawing upon existing knowledge of Pasifika dementia in Aotearoa, I have situated my short film within the context of existing dementia-related short films. Utilising autoethnographic and heuristic methodologies,

I have developed a narrative that allowed me, as the researcher, to investigate this condition despite not having dementia myself. Throughout the production process, I have employed techniques such as storyboarding, case studies, and prototyping, systematically organised within the production pipeline from preproduction to postproduction.

## Acknowledgements

To my nana Salevalsi Holdsworth, née Laumea, and my mother, Diana Holdsworth-Perks, I thank you for being my two main actresses in this short film. I could not think of anyone else to star in this project other than the two most inspiring women in my life. Thank you to my family for supporting me through all that I have done and will do in the future.

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# Contents

Abstract.....	v
Acknowledgements .....	vi
Table of Images.....	viii
Attestation of Authorship .....	x
Intellectual Property Declaration.....	xi
Ethics Approval and Consents.....	xii
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Chapter Two: Positioning the Researcher .....	3
The Researcher’s Perspective.....	4
Ethical Considerations .....	4
Reflections on Methodology .....	5
Why This Research Matters .....	5
Reflexivity .....	5
Chapter Three: Review of Contextual Knowledge.....	6
Pasifika Dementia .....	8
Spirituality and Mythology .....	9
<b>Myself with my Research.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Chapter Four: Research Design.....	12
Heuristic Inquiry and Autoethnography.....	12
Spiritual and Cultural Symbolism .....	12
Creative Practice Process .....	14
Storyboarding and Narrative Development .....	14
Cultural and Visual Influences.....	16
Animation Tests and Iteration .....	17
Practical Production and Live-Action Testing .....	18
Test Shoots and Actor Preparation.....	19
Set Design and Adaptation .....	19
Conclusion .....	22
Chapter Five: Critical Commentary .....	23
Introduction .....	23
Creative Rationale.....	23
Methodologies and Cultural Frameworks.....	24
Development of the Work .....	25
Critical Reflection .....	26
Contextualisation in Practice and Research.....	28
Conclusion .....	29
Chapter Six: Summary and Conclusion .....	31
References .....	32

# List of Figures

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Figure 1. Centenary Celebration of my Great-grandmother. ....	3
This photograph was taken during the 100th birthday celebration of the researcher’s great-grandmother, an event attended by the extended family. At the time, she retained the ability to recognise and recall each family member. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).	
Figure 2. Screenshot from <i>The Father</i> (Zeller, 2020, 28 minutes).....	6
In this scene, Olivia Colman’s character, Anne, is introducing the new nurse to her father, played by Anthony Hopkins. © New Zealand Trust Corporation as Trustee for Elarof Channel Four Television Corporation, Trademark Father Limited, F Comme Film, Ciné-@, Orange Studio, 2020.	
Figure 3. My Samoan Great-grandparents. ....	13
The ghost character in the film <i>Gasegase o le Mafaufau</i> represents an ancestor who watches over the mother character. This figure is physically based on my Samoan great-grandmother pictured on the right. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).	
Figure 4. Images of the First Storyboards digitally drawn.....	14
© Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).	
Figure 5. More Storyboard Iterations. ....	15
© Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).	
Figure 6. Screenshot of the Hallway Animation Test.....	16
Footage recorded with Samsung S23 FE and drawn over with 2D animation with Krita (2D animation programme). © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).	
Figure 7. Screenshot of the Hallway Animation Test.....	16
Animation inspired by Len Lye’s <i>Tusalava</i> (1929). © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).	
Figure 8. First acting test shot with my mother and grandmother in my grandmother’s kitchen..	17
© Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).	
Figure 9. Outside my Great-Grandmother’s House.....	18
Here are four generations of women in my family from my great grandmother, grandmother, mother to me. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).	
Figure 10. Test Shot of the Kitchen. ....	19
Photographed with my phone, Samsung S23 FE. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).	
Figure 11. Test Shot of the Hallway. ....	19
Photographed with my phone, Samsung S23 FE. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).	

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/fair-use/what-is-fair-use/>

Figure 12. Test Shot of the Dining Room .....20  
Photographed with my phone, Samsung S23 FE. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

Figure 13. Test Shot of the Bedroom. ....20  
Photographed with my phone, Samsung S23 FE. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

Figure 14. Photo of my Great Grandparents, my Baby Brother and me. ....25  
Photo taken in 2007. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

## Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.



Luceanne Taimalietane Perks. 5 May 2025

## Intellectual Property Declaration

I retain copyright in all images and creative work produced and presented as part of this thesis apart from the following images that are the intellectual property of others listed below in the order they appear in this exegesis:

Figure 2. Screenshot from *The Father* (Zeller, 2020, 28 minutes).

In this scene, Olivia Colman's character, Anne, is introducing the new nurse to her father, played by Anthony Hopkins. © New Zealand Trust Corporation as Trustee for Elarof Channel Four Television Corporation, Trademark Father Limited, F Comme Film, Ciné-@, Orange Studio, 2020.



Luceanne Taimalietane Perks. 5 May 2025

## **Ethics Approval and Consents**

This project did not require ethical approval. Being an autoethnographic inquiry, it only drew on identifiable content from the researcher. The study did not involve any other participants in the research or outcomes.

While there was no need for ethics approval, the researcher accepted that considerations for physical and emotional safety were needed, due to the intensiveness and nature of the work. Strategies to address this included attentive communication with supervisors, seeking support from student support services within AUT and connecting with a peer support network.

# Chapter One: Introduction

Dementia is a broad term for a decline in cognitive abilities, memory loss, thinking and behavioural changes (Ministry of Health, 2013). This progressive decline in brain function impacts the individual's life, interfering with daily life and, in most cases, requiring a caregiver. The caregiver can be either a nurse or a family member. For those willing to take on the role of looking after a loved one with dementia, it will also take a toll on their own mental health and wellbeing. Within the Pasifika<sup>3</sup> community of New Zealand (Aotearoa), it is more common for those with dementia to live at home with a family member rather than move to a care home. (Alzheimers New Zealand, 2023, 2025; Pacific Dementia Māngalo, 2025). This leads to there being a lot of unreliable data for Pacific people with dementia, as most are home-based rather than being institutionalised. Pacific people are at a higher risk than New Zealand Europeans for genetic health conditions and exposure to environmental factors which can affect dementia more severely (Cullum et al., 2018). There is also limited research available currently within the Pasifika community regarding dementia (Ma'u et al., 2024).<sup>4</sup>

This research explores the experience of dementia for Pacific individuals and their families in New Zealand, highlighting how the illness often unseen and highly stigmatised within Pasifika communities is shaped by cultural misunderstandings, spiritual beliefs, delayed diagnoses, limited support, and systemic inequities. These factors contribute to widespread fear, misinformation, and disconnection, particularly within such a large and diverse population affected by or at risk of developing dementia.

*Gasegase o le Mafaufau* seeks to explore dementia using a Pasifika cultural framework, *aiga* (family), and *fa'aaloalo* (respect), to create a short narrative film that promotes more empathetic understanding of dementia. It employs autoethnographic and heuristic enquiry methodologies to investigate and represent the experiences of dementia within the Pasifika community, and integrates self-reflection and cultural insights into the narrative process.

The central research question guiding this study is “How might dementia be lensed through a Pasifika cultural framework as a short narrative film that communicates an empathetic

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<sup>3</sup> Pasifika and Pacific people are used interchangeably within this thesis. Pasifika and Pacific people are both broad terms for those of Pacific Island descent, Pasifika is a term more referred to with New Zealand or the Pacific descendants living within New Zealand. Within this thesis, I have used the term which suited the context or sentence structure.

<sup>4</sup> A feasibility study for a national dementia prevalence study in New Zealand emphasised the need for more comprehensive data, noting that current estimations are based on overseas data. The study aimed to prepare the ground for the first full-scale New Zealand dementia prevalence study that is representative of Māori, European, Pacific, and Asian peoples living in the country. The authors highlighted the necessity of such a study to address the growing concern over dementia prevalence, particularly among Māori and Pacific peoples, by 2050. (Ma'u et al., 2024)

understanding of the condition?” Additionally, other considerations include asking how the worldview of Pasifika people in Aotearoa permeates their collective experiences of dementia.

This study aims to bring awareness to the topic of Pasifika people with dementia to the wider community. The hope is that my Master's project can help further research within this field. Within the Pacific community, this study can contribute to reducing stigma around dementia due to people being more informed about this topic. The unique aspect of it being a short film lets more people experience this topic within the digital age. This research also has a deep connection for me as I have family members, past and present, who have dementia, which motivates me to find out more and share this knowledge with others, so more people are aware of dementia.

In this exegesis, Chapter One has established the research topic, problem, objectives, and significance while Chapter Two accounts the researcher's history. Chapter Three reviews existing literature on dementia, Pasifika perspectives, and short films. The following chapter details the autoethnographic and heuristic methodological frameworks that were employed in the research, while also presenting and analysing the findings from the research. In Chapter Five, the implications of the findings and how they contribute to answering the research question are discussed, leading to a conclusion in the final chapter which summarise the research and its contributions, and suggests areas for future research.

## Chapter Two: Positioning the Researcher

Throughout my upbringing, it has always felt like I had three sets of grandparents as my maternal great-grandparents were alive for most of my young life. My immediate and extended family would make time to visit them in their retirement village in Levin but, once my great-grandfather started declining and was moved to a hospital ward, the adults tried to ensure my siblings and I did not see him in his frail state. During this time, and even a few years after his funeral, I still did not know why we did not see him more before he left. It was only after my great-grandmother relocated to Auckland to be closer to her son, my grandfather, did it become more apparent to me and my siblings why this had happened. Seeing how dementia has affected my great-grandmother, I understand now that it would have been difficult to tell a child why my great-grandfather was acting strangely.

Dementia affected each of my great-grandparents differently. My great-grandfather's decline was rapid; staff at his retirement village reported erratic behaviour, including inappropriate physical contact with female caregivers, a stark contrast to the friendly, albeit stubborn, man I remembered. Currently, I am observing that my great-grandmother is in gradual decline, and her memories appear to be slowly fading. I remember her as someone who moved with ease and made snacks for my siblings and me when we were younger. She was determined and independent, often heading out on long walks if a particular fruit she wanted was not available at home. During her 100th birthday celebration (Figure 1), she became visibly irritated when the proceedings took too long, insisting she wanted to sit down.

**Figure 1**

*Centenary celebration of my great-grandmother*



*Note.* This photograph was taken during the 100th birthday celebration of the researcher's great-grandmother, an event attended by the extended family. At the time, she retained the ability to recognise and recall each family member. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

Now, when I visit her, she often repeats the same stories. At times, it seems she recounts dreams as though they were real events. She is currently the only living elder in my family with dementia, although several of my Samoan elders, including a sibling of my maternal grandmother, have recently passed away after living with the same illness. Dementia has impacted many of my Samoan relatives.

Growing up around dementia, it became a seemingly normal part of life. However, as I have matured, I have come to understand the profound impact it has; not only on those living with it but also on their families. This realisation has inspired me to share these experiences through my creative work.

### **The Researcher's Perspective**

As a young Pasifika person in Aotearoa New Zealand, my understanding of dementia has come solely through witnessing family members experiencing it. This has only deepened my curiosity to find out more about this subject. I have found myself asking questions: How does dementia affect people differently? Why do some decline faster than others? Why do some people never experience it at all?

These questions have made me reflect on both parts of my family, New Zealand European and Samoan. Since dementia has touched both, I felt compelled to create something that acknowledges this dual heritage. Growing up in a mixed family environment, I came to understand the importance of identity and cultural context. It was essential to bring that into my short film narrative. I needed to create a piece of work that felt unique and that had a strong personal purpose and meaning throughout. This led me to develop *Gasegase o le Mafauau*.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This project employs heuristics and autoethnography to explore dementia through a Pasifika lens. As someone who has not personally experienced dementia, *Gasegase o le Mafauau* is grounded in the researcher's subjective and familial perspective. These methodologies were chosen to deepen my own understanding of dementia based on lived experiences and cultural reflection. Through memory, cultural insight, and the limited research available on Pasifika dementia, I have developed a perspective that bridges both my Western and Pacific heritage.

## **Reflections on Methodology**

Both autoethnography and heuristics methodologies allow me to explore dementia from a distinct perspective. As dementia can be experienced differently by everyone, I needed to know what I wanted to present in a short film, and how to do so. With heuristics and autoethnography, I could input my own memories with those around me affected by dementia and express that through my work. With this approach, I could also present dementia from a Pacific perspective within this research project. In understanding and breaking down these observations, I was able to build them into my research and my short film.

## **Why This Research Matters**

Exploring dementia through a Pasifika lens holds deep personal significance, while offering additional valuable academic contributions to interpreting culturally specific experiences with dementia in New Zealand. There is limited research available on Pasifika dementia; therefore, looking for information about dementia or on those seeking help for their loved ones is difficult due to the lack of published research. The cultural beliefs about memory, ageing and mental health differ from Western views. Pasifika peoples view ageing and dementia as a part of the natural life cycle—it is important to have research centred around these ideologies. This research brings out my family's cultural beliefs in the form of a mixed-media short film which I hope that this mixed-media short film which I hope will enhance awareness around current and future sufferers, and for those suffering from dementia now as well as those who experience it in the future.

## **Reflexivity**

My contribution to this research is personal as I am using my own interpretations of dementia through family experiences, which I am aware could be different from anyone else's. My filmmaking knowledge also adds another element that affects my interpretation of the research. As a filmmaker, I show the narrative I choose, which will be rooted in my own experiences, but this narrative could differ from person to person. I am aware that this research will not speak for every Pacific person with dementia and could seem to be biased towards, for example, Pacific people living in New Zealand with dementia. However, this project is bigger than me and every step forward with this topic will help encourage new research from now and into the future.

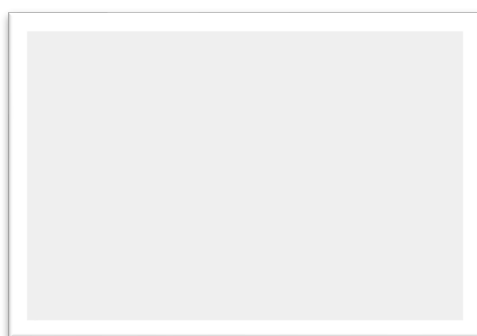
## Chapter Three: Review of Contextual Knowledge

To create *Gasegase o le Mafaufau: A Short Film about Pasifika People Living with Dementia*, I drew upon existing short films and other digital media related to dementia. These works informed my production, providing an array of narrative techniques and thematic elements, including memory loss, identity, isolation, loneliness, hope and resilience for those affected; the impact that dementia has on the family, and the sacrifice and role of the caregiver/s particularly when making ethical and moral decisions for their loved ones.

A prominent theme in the portrayal of dementia is memory loss and identity. Films like *The Father*, directed by Florian Zeller (2020), and *Forgotten* (Robinson, 2017) explore how dementia affects a person's sense of self. In *The Father*, the main character experiences a profound loss of identity as his memory deteriorates, leading to confusion and a sense of dislocation. Similarly, *Forgotten* portrays a man struggling to retain his identity through writing, only to forget his loved ones as his condition worsens. These films highlight the emotional turmoil and existential crisis faced by individuals with dementia (Figure 2). In *Gasegase o le Mafaufau*, the leading character forgets what everyday foods are when sharing a family meal and gets frustrated with herself and the loss of the ability to remember.

### Figure 2

Screenshot from *The Father* (Zeller, 2020, 28 minutes)



Note. In this scene, Olivia Colman's character, Anne, is introducing the new nurse to her father, played by Anthony Hopkins.

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Familial relationships are another central matter. The impact of dementia on family dynamics is poignantly depicted in *In Their Eyes* (Babz, 2020) and *The Wait* (McColgan, 2018). *In Their Eyes* focuses on a single mother balancing her life while caring for her mother in a dementia care home, showcasing the sacrifices and emotional challenges involved. *The Wait* features a

touching interaction between a pregnant woman and her father, revealing their deep bond and the strain dementia places on their relationship. These films underscore the emotional toll on family members and the complex decisions they must navigate. In the artefact of this research, we see the interaction that occurs between the main character and her main caregiver, her daughter. The daughter needs to constantly redirect her mother, be very patient in dealing with her erratic nature at times and then also her forgetfulness and frustrations. In this way, we can see that the role of a caregiver can be very challenging for an individual.

The subject of caregiving and sacrifice is vividly portrayed in these films. Caregivers are often depicted as dedicated and patient, bearing a significant emotional burden. *In Their Eyes* exemplifies this through the mother's struggle to provide for her child while caring for her mother. This theme is crucial in understanding the broader social implications of dementia care and the resilience required by caregivers.

Isolation and loneliness are also prevalent ideas. Characters with dementia often experience a sense of isolation as they lose their ability to communicate and connect with others. *Fish Memory* (Sharufuddin, 2023), for instance, illustrates a Malaysian fishmonger's slip from reality, emphasising the universal nature of dementia symptoms and the isolation felt by those affected. This theme highlights the importance of social support and understanding in mitigating the loneliness experienced by dementia patients. In *Gasegase o le Mafaufau*, the leading character draws into herself near the end and seems frustrated with herself and all that is going on around her; she even turns inward and starts to connect with the spiritual realm, depicted through animation.

Despite the challenges, many films incorporate elements of hope and resilience. *Late Afternoon* (Bagnall, 2017), for example, offers a more hopeful perspective by infusing the narrative with a sense of childlike wonder. The protagonist, Emily, slowly remembers her life through her belongings, eventually recalling her daughter. This depiction reshapes the perception of dementia from a tragic disease to a natural part of ageing, providing a more optimistic outlook. Hope and resilience are depicted in *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* through the lead character reconnecting with loved ones from the spiritual realm, who comfort her.

Lastly, ethical and moral dilemmas are frequently addressed in these films. Decisions regarding the use of memory aids, moving a loved one into a care facility, and balancing autonomy with safety, are common themes. These dilemmas are explored in various narratives, prompting viewers to consider the complex ethical landscape of dementia care. Although in *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* no ethical or moral decisions are shown to be made for the family's loved one in the

short narrative, we do see the sacrifice of the caregiver in being able to manage the day-to-day tasks and the life of their loved one.

### **Pasifika Dementia**

Dementia is an umbrella term describing symptoms that affect brain function (Alzheimer's New Zealand, 2017). Aranitakis et al. (2019) further define it as "an acquired loss of cognition in multiple cognitive domains sufficiently severe to affect social and occupational function" (p. 1589). From these definitions, dementia is more than just memory loss due to ageing; it is a clinically diagnosable cognitive impairment.

Pasifika dementia refers to dementia in individuals of Pacific Island descent living in New Zealand. Cullum's (2018) research into dementia within New Zealand's multicultural context found that Māori and Pacific people are more likely to develop dementia earlier than their New Zealand European counterparts. Additionally, higher rates of diabetes, alcohol abuse, and other factors contribute to a more aggressive form of dementia/Alzheimer's in these populations (Cullum et al., 2018, p. 1102). Fa'alau et al. (2024) explore dementia from a Samoan perspective, detailing interviews with Samoans with dementia and their family members. They found that "there was no single Samoan concept of dementia and its origins" (p. 17). Current research indicates that, clinically, there is no difference between a New Zealand European and a Pacific person with dementia. However, high-risk factors in Pacific communities and the Pacific worldview result in different approaches to dementia such as elevated rates of conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and obesity, alongside limited access to healthcare and lower levels of education. Cultural beliefs, religion, language barriers, and a strong emphasis on family care also influence how dementia is understood and managed, often leading to delayed diagnosis and treatment.

### **Samoan Worldview**

Seiuli (2013a, b) introduces the concept of *faletalimalo*.<sup>5</sup> He used the metaphor of the faletalimalo, a modern Samoan meeting house built for receiving and welcoming guests, as a conceptual framework for the Uputāua Therapeutic Approach.<sup>6</sup> This framework encompasses all cultural aspects of the Samoan viewpoint, which are not fully addressed by Western approaches, such as spirituality, culture, customs, family, and relational space (pp. 55–57). Palaamo (2019) further utilises Samoan concepts such as *fa'asamoa* (Samoan lifestyle or way of life) and *vā* (relational space between people and between the worlds around us) in the Tafatolu Methodological Framework. This framework allows researchers to incorporate their culture within academic projects. These researchers, though in different academic fields, frame the Pacific perspective, particularly the Samoan worldview, which is crucial for my research. I have

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<sup>5</sup> Faletalimalo is a modern Samoan meeting house specifically built for receiving and welcoming guests.

<sup>6</sup> Uputāua can then be understood to mean 'words of wisdom' or 'sacred conversations'.

used the values of *fa'asamoa* and *vā* from my family's ancestral context to help frame my research for those with more Western perspectives and to invite them to understand my cultural background. *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* also uses these views to reach out to those affected by dementia within the Pasifika community.

### **Spirituality and Mythology**

To gain a deeper understanding of a Samoan perspective, my research explores the interconnected realms of spirituality and mythology. As Teariki and Leau (2024) explain, “Spirituality has its origins in the varied mythologies that have guided Pacific peoples over the aeons” (p. 140). While each Pacific Island has its own unique customs and traditions, many of their spiritual beliefs share similar ancestral roots.

Dickie (2005) offers insight into how myths and traditions have shaped the cultural identities of Pacific communities. She highlights the sacredness of nature, land, water and sky, as central elements in Pacific Island cosmologies and mythologies (pp. 4–7). These natural elements are not merely symbolic but are woven into the spiritual identities of Pacific peoples.

A key aspect of spirituality in the Pacific is the belief in spirits and gods, each island having its own pantheon and oral histories. These stories, traditionally passed down through generations by word of mouth, present challenges for researchers due to their ephemeral and evolving nature. Nevertheless, Turner (1884) provides one of the earliest written accounts of Samoan mythology, documenting the deities and their roles within Samoan culture in detail (pp. 16–87). One figure that directly influences my animation work is *Saveasiuleo*,<sup>7</sup> a spirit whom Turner (1884) describes as having a human upper body and a fish-like lower body that extends into the sea (p. 259). His hybrid form symbolises the connection between land, sea, and spirit, which is an important theme in my creative practice.

A notable example of mythology being explored through film is *Tusalava*,<sup>8</sup> a black-and-white animation by Len Lye (1929) composed of 4,400 hand-drawn frames. The film illustrates the evolutionary journey of a cellular being, inspired by Polynesian mythology that suggests human life evolved from worms. Though abstract in form, *Tusalava* draws on symbolic motifs from Pacific culture to represent the cycle of life and death. Despite the original score being lost, the visual storytelling continues to resonate, often accompanied by modern reinterpretations. The film serves as an early model for integrating cultural heritage with experimental animation.

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<sup>7</sup> The translation of the name is “Savea of the Echo” (Bennett, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> a Samoan word which suggests that things go full circle.

Another consideration in researching Pacific spirituality is the influence of Christianity. Although I was not raised with religious beliefs and do not personally align with biblical teachings, I acknowledge that Christianity has played a significant role in shaping spiritual life in Samoa since its introduction in 1830. This influence is reflected in much of the existing research, where myths and legends are often filtered through Christian perspectives. However, my focus is on pre-Christian spiritual beliefs, and it is this ancestral mythology that informs the design and narrative of my short film. Through animation, I aimed to preserve and reimagine these ideas from Samoan myths for contemporary audiences. By incorporating spiritual symbols, deities, and stories into visual form, my work seeks to ensure these traditional narratives are shared with a generation of people operating in and out of the digital age.

### **Myself within my Research**

The depiction of dementia within a short film cannot be accurate for everyone who has the condition because the illness has diverse manifestations. As a Pasifika director, I am led by the Samoan values of fa'a'aloalo (respect) and vā (relational space). Portraying a Pasifika worldview makes my short film distinct from others already available in the public domain (Babz, 2020; Bagnall, 2017; McColgan, 2018; Robinson, 2017; Sharufuddin, 2023; Yao, 2017).

Although studies about dementia within Pasifika communities suggest that, medically, there is nothing significantly different from a New Zealand European experience of the condition, research like that by Fa'alau et al. (2024), which employed interview methods, indicates that, for Samoan families, dementia is not simply a medical experience. Family members consider it an obligation to honour and care for their loved one at home, often at considerable cost and with limited access to culturally appropriate services.

Research literature relating specifically to older Pacific people experiencing dementia is sparse (Fa'alau et al., 2024). Tamasese et al. (2014) note that when a family elder is affected by health issues, their wellbeing affects the entire family and community. They also highlight that the concept of an elder across the Pacific carries deep and prestigious cultural meaning, including status and spiritual roles, associations with knowledge, leadership, and the protection of families and kin groups. Research by Ihara and Ofahengaue Vakalahi (2011) and Tautolo et al. (2017) indicates that Pacific families generally prefer to care for elders at home. Fa'alau et al. (2024) suggest that this preference is why Pacific understanding and experiences of dementia in Aotearoa New Zealand are often poorly understood because older Pacific people living with the condition are not seen in public care facilities that generally operate within Western paradigms of mental health.

My work may be positioned within a broader scope of short films about dementia including *Fish Memory* (Sharufuddin, 2023) and *Late Afternoon* (Bagnall, 2017), as well as feature films that consider the role of caregivers like *The Father* (Zeller, 2020). Both themes are presented within my project because Pasifika culture focuses on aiga.

Thus, in this project, my research project and I are two voices talking with one another. As I have lived experiences with dementia in my family, I have positioned myself within the project as a form of hybrid practice “by employing a polyphony of voices, including my own, to challenge audiences to rethink the paradoxes of social exclusion” (Daniel, 2009 p. 159).

By examining these films (Babz, 2020; Bagnall, 2017; McColgan, 2018; Robinson, 2017; Sharufuddin, 2023; Yao, 2017) through various thematic lenses, memory loss and identity, familial relationships, caregiving and sacrifice, isolation and loneliness, hope and resilience, ethical and moral dilemmas, we gain deeper insights into how dementia affects individuals and their families emotionally, psychologically, socially, and culturally.

As I integrate these ideas into my short film, I aim to offer a representation that resonates with Pasifika audiences while contributing to broader conversations about dementia care globally. This approach not only enriches my film but also positions it within existing narratives about dementia, highlighting both universal experiences shared across cultures as well as specific cultural nuances that shape how communities understand ageing-related illnesses like dementia.

## Chapter Four: Research Design

This chapter outlines the methodological framework and research strategies underpinning the development of *Gasegase o le Mafaufau*. The creative production drew on two primary approaches: heuristic inquiry and autoethnography, both of which prioritise one's own experience and self-reflection as valuable sources of knowledge. These methods served to shape the film's aim: to portray dementia through a Pasifika lens rooted in Samoan culture and spirituality.

### Heuristic Inquiry and Autoethnography

Moustakas (1990) describes heuristic inquiry as a unique method involving six distinct stages: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. These stages are recursive, rather than linear, allowing meaning to emerge through sustained reflection. My initial engagement with dementia began in childhood, observing its impact on my great-grandfather. This understanding deepened when my great-grandmother showed signs of the condition.

In parallel with heuristic inquiry, I employed autoethnography, as defined by Ellis et al. (2011), which seeks to describe and systematically analyse a distinctive experience (auto) to understand cultural experience (ethno). Drawing from my own memories and cultural background, I examined how dementia is experienced within Samoan families, particularly focusing on the values of fa'aaloalo, vā, and communal care.

Together, these methods allowed me to develop a narrative that is both personalised and culturally embedded, offering insight into how dementia might be understood and represented through a Samoan worldview.

### Spiritual and Cultural Symbolism

Spirituality plays a central role in both my own understanding of dementia and the creative direction of *Gasegase o le Mafaufau*. Drawing from Polynesian mythology and cultural beliefs, I have incorporated symbolic elements to reflect how spiritual perspectives shape experiences of illness, memory, and identity.

One significant spiritual motif is the ghost character. In Samoan and broader Polynesian culture, the presence of spirits or ancestors is often felt in daily life. In the film, the ghost represents an ancestor who watches over the mother character, offering comfort in moments of confusion. While abstract, this figure is physically based on my Samoan great-grandmother (Figure 3),

known in our family as a seer, someone connected to the spiritual world. Her presence lends authenticity to the representation of ancestral guardianship.

**Figure 3**

*My Samoan Great-grandparents*



*Note.* The ghost character in the film *Gasegase o le Mafau Fau* represents an ancestor who watches over the mother character. This figure is physically based on my Samoan great-grandmother pictured on the right. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

Another spiritual symbol is the lizard, or *mo'o*, which in Polynesian mythology is often seen as a personification of gods or ancestral spirits. The New Zealand Electronic Text Collection notes that lizards were frequently associated with divine presences or protective beings (Buck, 2021). In my narrative, the spirit transforms into a lizard once its protective task is complete, returning to nature. This transformation symbolises a cyclical view of life and death, a worldview where the spiritual and physical realms are intimately connected. The ghost and lizard are connected as one spiritual entity. The transition from the ghost to the lizard represents the ghost moving on as she is no longer needed once the daughter character enters the scene. The ghost will walk among us as a lizard.

I also explored the use of *siapo* (Samoan bark cloth) as a visual metaphor. Siapo patterns traditionally tell stories, preserve genealogy, and embody cultural knowledge. In *Gasegase o le*

*Mafaufau*, an animated siapo flows through the hallway, guiding the protagonist toward a moment of spiritual connection. This imagery was inspired by both my family's relationship with tapa cloth and the wave-like transitions in *Late Afternoon* by Louise Bagnall (2017), which similarly blends memory and emotion through fluid animation. While I did not have access to my family's full siapo pattern, I designed a symbolic version incorporating Pacific motifs such as *manulua*<sup>9</sup> (union), *enata* (people), arrows (guidance), and breadfruit (personal heritage), to convey themes of unity, protection, and cultural continuity.

These symbols serve both narrative and representational functions, reframing dementia not solely as a medical condition, but as a spiritual and communal experience. This shift is significant for Pacific audiences, where spiritual and ancestral connections often inform understandings of illness, memory, and care.

### **Creative Practice Process**

The creative development of *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* was iterative, intuitive, and informed by my heuristic and autoethnographic methodologies. In particular, storyboarding, animation testing, and case study analysis played critical roles in transforming personal and cultural reflections into visual and narrative decisions.

### **Storyboarding and Narrative Development**

Storyboarding was the initial step in articulating the film's visual language. As a solo creator, I found it more effective to begin with sketches (Figure 4), rather than a written script, as the imagery and pacing were already playing out in my mind. Each frame allowed me to explore how memory, confusion, and care could be conveyed through both realism and abstraction.

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<sup>9</sup> *Manulua* literally translates to *lua* - two manu - birds (Samoan).

**Figure 4**

*Images of the First Storyboards*



Note. Digitally drawn. © Luceanne Taimaietane Perks (2025).

The first storyboard focused on a family dinner scene, with the mother character struggling to recognise those around her—a symptom drawn from my lived experience. Early concepts also included visual effects such as blurring or changing faces, inspired by *The Father* (Zeller, 2020), where characters physically shift to represent memory loss. However, due to practical constraints, I revised this to a scene in which the daughter character is temporarily replaced by another actor. This change allowed me to explore identity disorientation in a feasible yet meaningful way.

Feedback, prompted a second iteration of the storyboard (Figure 5), which gave greater depth to the mother–daughter relationship and introduced additional symptoms of dementia to avoid repetition. This version opened with the two characters preparing food, providing a more natural depiction of memory lapses, emotional tension, and caregiving dynamics.



## Animation Tests and Iteration

Animation testing was a necessary method for refining ideas and assessing technical feasibility. The hallway scene, where the animated siapo guides the protagonist to her bedroom, was one of the first sequences tested. I filmed rough live-action footage using my phone and overlaid 2D animation in Krita. This helped visualise how the siapo would move and interact with the environment (Figure 6).

### Figure 6

*Screenshot of the hallway animation test.*

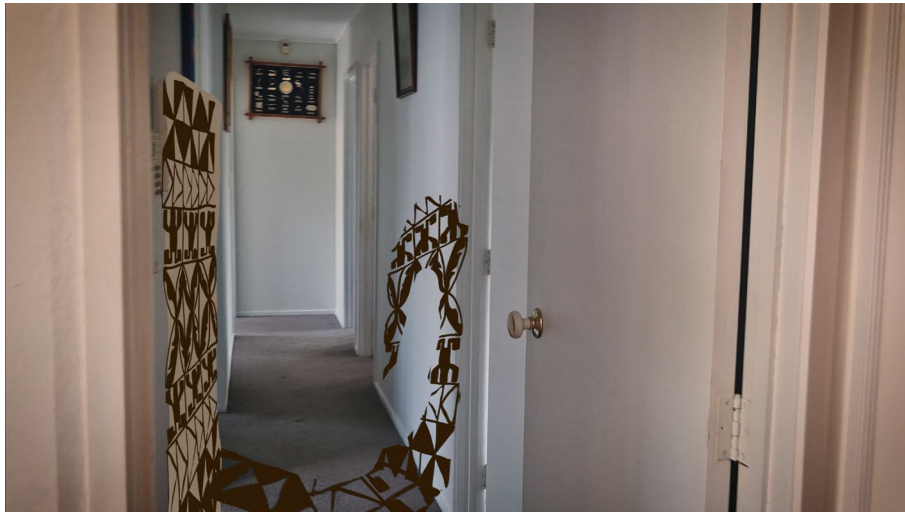


*Note.* Footage recorded with Samsung S23 FE and drawn over with 2D animation with Krita (2D animation programme).  
© Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

Initial tests revealed issues with lighting, composition, and object placement. Based on feedback, I refilmed the scene with brighter lighting and used the siapo to obscure unwanted visual elements. I also revised the animation's movement, opting for a sinuous, worm-like motion (Figure 7), inspired by Len Lye's (1929) *Tusalava*, which abstractly depicted Polynesian origin myths through writhing forms. This motion added a subtle reference to spiritual transformation and ancestral flow.

**Figure 7**

*Screenshot of the hallway animation test. Animation inspired by Len Lye's (1929) Tusalava.*



Note. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

These iterative tests bridged cultural symbolism and visual storytelling, ensuring that each animated element carried both aesthetic and narrative significance.

## **Practical Production and Live-Action Testing**

**Figure 8**

*First acting test shot with my mother and grandmother in my grandmother's kitchen.*



Note. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

Filming *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* required careful planning, testing, and adaptation, particularly since my cast consisted of non-actors, my mother and grandmother (Figure 8). Filming with

family added emotional significance to the project while presenting unique challenges in terms of directing and capturing authentic performances.

## Test Shots and Actor Preparation

To prepare for the shoot, I conducted test scenes to assess my actors' comfort levels, test camera angles, and troubleshoot technical issues. The first test scene involved the mother and daughter preparing dinner together, reflecting everyday acts of care, a space where memory and routine can clash.

Initial tests revealed logistical challenges, such as the narrow kitchen walkway limiting camera movement and glare from the reflective window behind the stove. Despite these limitations, the shoot allowed me to assess my family's natural chemistry. The dynamic between my mother and grandmother proved to be an unexpected asset; their interactions were instinctive and grounded in real experiences, particularly those involving my late great-grandmother.

Encouraged by this, I conducted a second test, using a wider camera angle and repositioning the action to the kitchen counter to capture more of the space. These tests highlighted the importance of responsiveness in directing, allowing the performers' personalities and rhythms to shape the scene authentically.

## Set Design and Adaptation

### Figure 9

*Outside my great-grandmother's house.*



*Note.* Here are four generations of women in my family from my great-grandmother (front right), grandmother (front left), mother (rear right) to me (rear left). © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

Production took place in my grandmother's home (Figure 9), which offered familiarity but required some alterations to suit the film's tone and focus. The kitchen, hallway, dining room, and bedroom each needed different degrees of staging.

**Kitchen:** Simplified by removing clutter and reintroducing select items, such as tea towels and family photographs, to add warmth and visual interest. The reflective window was covered with a mesh curtain to diffuse light.

**Figure 10**

*Test shot of the kitchen.*

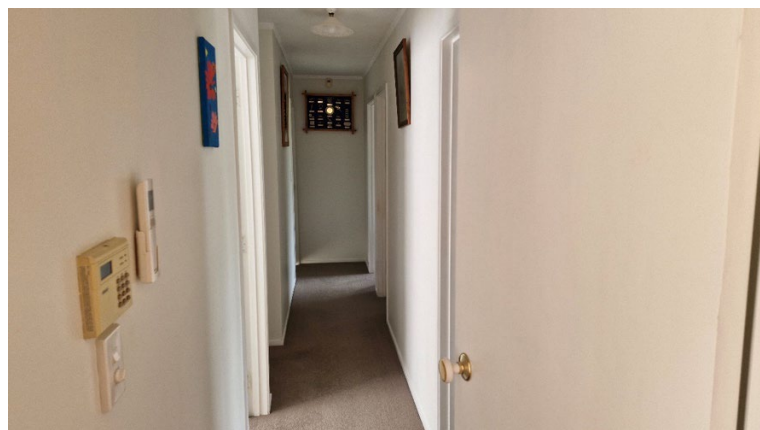


Note. Photographed with phone, Samsung S23 FE. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

**Hallway:** Served as a transitional space between the physical and spiritual realms, minimally staged with family photos to ground the animation elements that would be composited in post-production.

**Figure 11**

*Test shot of the hallway.*



Note. Photographed with phone, Samsung S23 FE. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

**Dining Room:** This space required no significant changes, serving as the central gathering point in the narrative.

**Figure 12**

*Test shot of the dining room.*



Note. Test shot of the dining room. Photographed with phone, Samsung S23 FE. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

**Bedroom:** Chosen for its lived-in, nostalgic atmosphere, resembling the spaces often occupied by elders in extended Pacific households. For the film, the addition of a fine mat (*toga*) on the back wall provided cultural specificity and visual texture.

**Figure 13**

*Test shot of the bedroom.*



Note. Test shot of the bedroom. Photographed with my phone, Samsung S23 FE. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

Each room was carefully chosen and adjusted to reflect an authentic yet stylised depiction of a Pacific home, one in which cultural values, family history, and everyday life are visually embedded.

## **Conclusion**

The research design for *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* has been shaped through a personalised and culturally grounded process. By weaving together heuristic inquiry and autoethnography, this project has allowed me to explore dementia not as a universal condition alone, but as a lived, cultural experience—one shaped by family, memory, mythology, and spirituality.

Each phase of production, from early storyboarding to live-action testing and animation development, has been iterative and reflective. The use of Pacific symbols—such as the siapo, ghost figure, and lizard spirit—has provided culturally specific ways of representing memory loss and ancestral presence. These visual metaphors are not merely aesthetic; they serve as bridges between the real and spiritual, the past and present, the seen and unseen.

Through my lived experience and cultural lens, this film offers a Pasifika perspective on dementia, one that values relational knowledge, fa'aaloalo (respect), and vā (relational space). These values have shaped not only the narrative but the process itself, influencing how I directed, designed, and responded to feedback. The short film is ultimately an act of care: a way of preserving cultural memory and honouring family through visual storytelling.

# Chapter Five: Critical Commentary

## Introduction

*Gasegase o le Mafaufau* is a short film that explores the lived experience of dementia within a Pasifika family context in Aotearoa New Zealand. The film serves as both a creative expression and a research response to the under-representation of Pacific dementia stories in New Zealand media and academic literature. This critical commentary reflects on the creative rationale, methodological, and creative processes that informed the development of the work.

As a researcher and filmmaker of mixed Samoan and New Zealand European heritage, my perspective is shaped by intergenerational family experiences with dementia. These encounters, particularly with my great-grandparents and other elders, provided the emotional and cultural foundation of the film. Through this commentary, I examine how autoethnography and heuristic inquiry supported a culturally grounded exploration of memory loss, identity, and care, and how the creative process became a space for navigating both grief and understanding.

This chapter critically discusses the rationale behind the project, the integration of Pacific and Western research frameworks, the creative decisions made during production, and the ethical considerations of working with private and familial material. By situating this work within broader cultural and academic contexts, I aim to demonstrate the significance of creative practice as a valid and powerful form of inquiry, particularly for marginalised or culturally nuanced topics like Pasifika dementia.

## Creative Rationale

The decision to create *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* stemmed from a unique place. As I was growing up, dementia was a quiet but constant presence in my family. I witnessed the ways it changed my great-grandparents, how their personalities and memories shifted, how our interactions grew more fragile, and how those moments shaped my understanding of ageing, identity, and care. As I matured, I became aware that these experiences, though felt, were rarely spoken about openly, especially within Pasifika circles.

Dementia is often viewed through a Western biomedical lens, yet for many Pasifika families, including my own, it intersects with spiritual beliefs, cultural values, and intergenerational silence. I noticed that discussions about memory loss were either avoided or cloaked in euphemisms, and that confusion or fear often replaced understanding. This absence of dialogue, and the emotional weight it carried, became one of the driving forces behind the film. In choosing to make a short film, I wanted to express these layered experiences in a form that could speak both emotionally and visually. Film allowed me to combine unique storytelling with

symbolic representation, capturing the fragmentation of memory and the cultural disconnects that can arise when health experiences are not adequately understood within one's own worldview. Thus, bringing in values of *aiga* and *fa'aaloalo* are reflected in the film by using my own family members as actors.

This film is not an attempt to offer answers or medical explanations, but rather to create space for visibility, empathy, and reflection. It aims to acknowledge the quiet grief that families carry, while also showing the moments of love, humour, and strength that persist throughout the progression of dementia. Most importantly, it seeks to add to the limited cultural narratives around Pasifika dementia in Aotearoa New Zealand, contributing a voice that is both individual and communal.

### **Methodologies and Cultural Frameworks**

The methodological foundation of this project lies in the combination of autoethnography and heuristic inquiry, both of which allow for reflection and meaning-making through lived experience. These approaches were chosen specifically to support a research process that honours not only academic rigour, but also emotional truth, cultural specificity, and creative freedom.

Autoethnography enabled me to position myself at the centre of the research, using my own memory and family experience as legitimate and valuable sources of knowledge. Rather than distancing myself from the subject, this approach allowed me to explore dementia as it has impacted my own life, family, and cultural identity. It also allowed me to speak from both insider and outsider positions, as a family member witnessing the effects of dementia first-hand, and as a researcher seeking to understand its wider significance through a creative lens.

Heuristic inquiry, with its emphasis on internal search, discovery, and self-dialogue, supported the emotional and intuitive aspects of the creative process. It allowed me to ask open-ended questions about memory, loss, and cultural identity, and to let the creative act of filmmaking become a method of exploration in itself. Through this process, I was able to identify emerging themes, such as repetition, confusion, and the blurred line between memory and imagination, that later shaped the film's structure and tone.

Equally important to the research process were Pacific ways of knowing and doing, particularly values such as *vā*, *alofa* (love), and *fa'aaloalo*. These values shaped not only how I approached my subject matter, but also how I represented family, elders, and cultural practices. I was conscious of the responsibility involved in sharing intimate stories, and of the ethical need to

represent them with care and cultural sensitivity. The concept of *teu le vā*<sup>10</sup> (the nurturing of relational spaces) was central to how I engaged with both my participants (in this case, family members) and my audience.

By integrating Western qualitative methods with Pasifika research values, I was able to follow a research process that was both academically grounded and culturally responsive.

### **Development of the Work**

The development of *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* began with a series of reflective journal entries and conversations with family members, which gradually evolved into visual and narrative ideas. The film draws heavily from my memories and observations of my great-grandmother's current experience with dementia, and recollections of other elders in my family who have lived with the illness. These fragments became the emotional core of the film and informed its non-linear, memory-like structure.

A key concept that emerged early in the process was the idea of repetition, how stories, moments, and emotions repeat in the lives of those living with dementia and in the experiences of their caregivers. This concept became central to the film's structure and rhythm. Visually and narratively, I used repeated actions such as my grandmother over-cleaning in the kitchen scene, and looping dialogue within the bedroom scene to evoke the cyclical and often disorienting nature of memory loss.

The creative process was also guided by the tension between clarity and confusion between the mother and daughter characters in almost every scene, a reflection of how dementia affects both the person living with it and their family. Scenes intentionally blur the lines between dream and reality, memory and present, to mirror how my great-grandmother sometimes speaks of imagined events as though they truly happened. It is present within the film in the animation sections, the irregularly moving tapa is used as the spirit, but also through her own subconscious thoughts speaking to her. This ambiguity was a deliberate choice, intended to evoke empathy in the viewer and offer a more immersive understanding of the condition.

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<sup>10</sup> Translation 'nurture the relation' (Pereira et al., 2016).

## Figure 14

*Photo of my great grandparents, my baby brother and me, taken in 2007.*



Note. © Luceanne Taimalietane Perks (2025).

Family photos, home video footage, and oral storytelling traditions I drew upon are what inspired me. They shaped both the film's visual aesthetic and its thematic focus on legacy, identity, and the fading of memory. This moment of clarity, preserved through memory and image, contrasts with my great-grandmother's current state, where recognition is no longer consistent. Filming involved practical and emotional challenges, from arranging time with my busy family, to understanding a deep subject matter such as dementia. Much of the material was shot with sensitivity to the subject matter, using soft lighting and slow pacing demonstrated in the beginning kitchen scene to mimic the slow decline of those with dementia. The editing process was particularly reflective; I experimented with ways to visually represent memory loss without making the illness feel clinical or sensationalised.

Throughout the development of the project, I remained aware of my dual role: both as a researcher aiming to communicate a cultural experience, and as a family member processing an individualised one. This duality influenced every creative decision, from the way characters were portrayed to the balance between emotional expression and cultural responsibility.

## Critical Reflection

Creating *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* was both an emotional and an intellectually challenging process. Reflecting on the work now, I recognise how experiences with dementia, particularly within my family, both enriched and complicated the creative process. The project allowed me to explore themes that were once too difficult to articulate, giving voice to the quiet grief that often accompanies watching a loved one slowly lose their memories and, with them, a sense of identity.

One of the most significant lessons I learned during the making of this film was the complexity of representing dementia without oversimplifying or sensationalising it. I wanted the film to evoke empathy, but also to offer insight into the humanity of those living with the illness. Too often, dementia is depicted as something purely tragic or clinical, reducing those affected to their diagnosis rather than celebrating their life and memories. I strived to show both the vulnerability and dignity of my great-grandmother, allowing her as much agency in the narrative as possible, even as her cognitive decline was central to the story.

The decision to use repetition in both the narrative structure and visual style was one of the most effective choices, yet also one of the most challenging. As the story unfolds, the viewer is invited to experience the disorienting effect of memory loss and the frustration of trying to hold onto fleeting moments. This was achieved through techniques such as repeated lines of dialogue, symbolic imagery, and fragmented scenes that mirror the confusion often felt by both the individual with dementia and their family members. However, I also faced the challenge of ensuring that the repetition was not excessive or alienating for the audience. Finding that balance required a great deal of experimentation in editing, and reflection on what would best serve the emotional and thematic goals of the film.

Another area where reflection was crucial was the ethical dimension of the project. Working with my own family's stories, particularly with respect to a subject as personal and sensitive as dementia, raised important questions about privacy, consent, and representation. I was conscious of the fact that some of the content, such as family memories or sensitive portrayals of illness, might bring up difficult emotions for those involved with this, therefore, as the filmmaker, I navigated this tension carefully, ensuring that my family members were fully aware of how their stories would be represented and that their perspectives were respected throughout the process.

Despite these challenges, the project reinforced my belief in the power of creative practice as a tool for both healing and community engagement. The film allowed me to process my own feelings about dementia, grief, and the complexities of identity within a Pasifika family. At the same time, it invited others to reflect on their own experiences with dementia and the ways in which cultural frameworks shape how we understand illness, memory, and care.

The feedback I received during screenings further solidified the significance of this work. Many viewers, especially those from Pasifika backgrounds, felt the portrayal of dementia in a family setting resonated with them and expressed how the film gave voice to experiences they had previously struggled to articulate. For non-Pasifika viewers, the film opened a window into the

unique cultural context of dementia care and the challenges that arise when cultural understandings of illness diverge from mainstream medical practices.

In conclusion, *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* has been an emotional and transformative project which has taken me, the researcher, on a path of self-discovery with these complicated feelings of exploring dementia and grief. It deepened my understanding of dementia as both a unique experience and a cultural phenomenon. While there were many challenges in representing such a complex topic, I believe the work has achieved its goal of offering a nuanced, empathetic portrayal of dementia within a Pasifika family context. Moving forward, I see opportunities to expand on this work, perhaps exploring other cultural perspectives on dementia or developing further resources for Pasifika communities in New Zealand.

### **Contextualisation in Practice and Research**

*Gasegase o le Mafaufau* fits within the broader landscape of creative research, particularly the intersection of *autoethnography* and *cultural storytelling*. While the film explores the unique and familial experience of dementia, it also contributes to a growing body of work that examines how Pasifika perspectives can inform understandings of health, illness, and identity.

In New Zealand, research on dementia tends to be dominated by biomedical frameworks that are often disconnected from cultural and social experiences of ageing and illness. By focusing on a Pasifika lens, this project highlights the importance of integrating cultural practices and values when discussing health and caregiving in the context of dementia.

One of the key contributions of this project is its role in addressing the under-representation of Pacific peoples in dementia research, both in New Zealand and globally. While Pacific communities in Aotearoa have been historically under-researched in many aspects of health, including dementia, this film provides a platform for Pasifika voices and experiences to be acknowledged and discussed. Through its narrative and visual storytelling, the film highlights the gaps in existing research and care structures for Pacific families affected by dementia, while also challenging the ways in which dementia is often framed in dominant medical discourse.

In a broader academic sense, this project draws on work that intersects cultural studies, narrative inquiry, and critical gerontology. Scholars have called for more culturally inclusive approaches to understanding dementia care, which address the specific needs of diverse communities, particularly in multicultural countries like New Zealand (Donnelly et al. 2019; Freedman et al. 2018). In particular, Pacific-focused dementia research remains sparse, and the narratives of Pacific families often go unheard in mainstream discussions. Through this project, I aimed to contribute to closing this gap in knowledge by embedding cultural understandings of

dementia care, identity, and memory within the narrative, using film as a vehicle to bring these perspectives to a wider audience.

Furthermore, the use of autoethnographic and heuristic methods connects this project to a tradition of *creative research practice*, which recognises the value of subjective experience and knowledge in academic inquiry. The combination of these methodologies allowed me to bridge the gap between academic research and creative expression. My own experience as a Pasifika person affected by dementia allowed me to reflect critically on how these narratives of loss and change are integral to the ways in which we understand illness and ageing in Pacific contexts.

By intertwining these research methodologies with creative production, I sought to challenge traditional notions of knowledge creation. Research is often perceived as a detached process; however, this project demonstrates that the personal and the academic can coexist and enrich one another. This film is a testament to the power of creative practice as a form of inquiry and its ability to generate new insights and understanding in a way that is accessible and engaging for a broader audience.

Through its intersection with critical research on dementia, identity, and Pacific culture, *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* contributes to the ongoing conversation about how we can better understand and address the needs of diverse communities affected by dementia. It provides an opportunity for further explorations of culturally competent care, the role of intergenerational relationships in dementia care, and the importance of creating space for culturally specific research within the broader field of gerontology.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

The process of creating this work has not only allowed me to engage with my own family's experience with dementia but also to contribute to the growing body of research that seeks to understand the intersections of culture, illness, and memory. By weaving together one's own narrative, autoethnography, and creative film techniques, the project highlights both the emotional and cultural complexities that dementia brings to Pasifika families in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Through the development of this short film, I have gained an expanding understanding of dementia, not just as a medical condition, but as a cultural phenomenon that shapes the way families interact, care for each other, and grieve. The film's emphasis on repetition,

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<sup>11</sup> The scientific study of the processes and problems of ageing from all aspects—biologic, clinical, psychological, sociologic, legal, economic, and political.

disorientation, and fragmented memory was designed to evoke the lived experience of dementia in a way that both honours the individual affected and engages viewers in a more empathetic and nuanced understanding of the illness.

The creative process also illuminated the gaps in existing research and the limitations of traditional Western frameworks for understanding dementia. The limited knowledge led me to research symbolism within traditional patterns and Pacific spirituality, as these are important aspects of Pasifika culture. Pasifika communities in New Zealand are often under-represented in dementia studies, and this project sought to contribute to filling this gap by foregrounding the Pasifika perspective. By doing so, I hope to inspire further research that acknowledges the cultural dimensions of caregiving and dementia care, and encourages more inclusive, culturally responsive practices within health systems.

The film's impact has been significant, not only in providing a platform for Pasifika voices but also in opening up a broader conversation about how dementia is understood and managed across different cultural contexts. The feedback I received from audiences, particularly those from Pasifika backgrounds, confirmed that the film resonated with those who have witnessed similar experiences within their own families. It has sparked discussions around dementia care, cultural stigma, and the need for greater cultural competence within healthcare systems.

In conclusion, *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* is more than just a film; it is a call to action for greater representation, understanding, and dialogue about dementia in Pasifika communities. It serves as both a self-reflection and a collective contribution to the ongoing conversation about dementia care, identity, and cultural awareness. As the project continues to evolve, I remain committed to exploring further avenues for research and creative work that can help support Pacific families in navigating the challenges of dementia and ageing.

Through this creative and academic endeavour, I have come to understand the power of storytelling in creating meaningful change. The film has not only allowed me to process my own experiences with dementia but also to share those experiences with others, fostering greater empathy, understanding, and cultural dialogue. It is my hope that this work continues to inspire others to reflect on the intersection of culture, memory, and identity in the context of dementia, and that it contributes to the ongoing development of more culturally inclusive health practices in Aotearoa and beyond.

Final film: <https://vimeo.com/1108809796?share=copy>

## Chapter Six: Summary and Conclusion

*Gasegase o le Mafaufau* is a practice-based short film and research project that examines the lived experiences of Pasifika individuals affected by dementia in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This exploration is informed by the researcher's experiences with family members experiencing dementia, utilising both heuristics and autoethnography as core methodologies.

By incorporating techniques such as storyboarding, the production pipeline, case studies, and animation, the project effectively integrates one's own identity into the creative process.

The primary aim of this work is to amplify the voices of Pasifika people living with dementia and those who care for them. In doing so, the project seeks to raise awareness, educate, and reduce the stigma surrounding dementia within Pasifika communities. Through this research, the goal is not only to broaden understanding but also to create a space for further studies on Pacific dementia, a largely under-researched topic in New Zealand.

Additionally, the project aims to inspire a younger audience by introducing a new form of storytelling through short films, encouraging the next generation to engage with these important topics. This journey has also sparked a broader vision to expand the research beyond Pasifika dementia, exploring more distinctive stories that reflect diverse experiences.

From the initial idea of exploring dementia through film to the final product, the project has been a journey that not only strengthened my individual identity but also demonstrated the power of storytelling. What began as a simple thought, "maybe I can make a short film about dementia?" has evolved into a realisation that anything is possible with persistence, creativity, and passion.

This academic achievement has rekindled a childlike wonder and the belief that dreams can become reality, reinforcing my confidence in my ability to complete such a significant project. It is my hope that *Gasegase o le Mafaufau* sparks greater awareness and interest in the topic of Pasifika dementia, and serves as a stepping stone for future research and creative works in this area.

Ultimately, this project seeks not only to raise awareness of dementia within Pasifika communities but also to inspire future filmmakers and researchers to take on projects that bring under-represented topics to light. By contributing to the conversation on cultural perspectives in dementia care and representation, this work aims to leave a lasting impact on both academic and creative fields, paving the way for more inclusive research and storytelling in the future.

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