

Appendix II Reading 2. Nora Vagi Brash: Which Way, Big Man?

Nora Vagi Brash: Which Way, Big Man?

Which Way Big Man? was first performed by the National W Theatre Company on 16 September 1976. The play challenges the audience to consider some of the ironies of modern day life in Papua New Guinea. It highlights the problems of living in a changing society. Many people in Papua New Guinea are now living at the crossroads and have to make important decisions about which road to take. We are all in charge of our own destiny and we must decide for ourselves how we want our society to grow. Our decisions should be based on respect for our past as well as our future. The old man in the play says to his son, "All the people in the village will laugh at you if you don't make a feast. They'll all think we two are rubbish men."

The old man's daughter-in-law says, "Look, why did you give the old man one of your good white shirts? He'll only put betel nut stains on it. And why has he put those flowers and that silly feather in his hair? It's stupid."

Characters

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Gou Haia | a public servant |
| 2. Sinob Haia | his wife |
| 3. Pita | domestic servant |
| 4. Hegame | Gou's cousin |
| 5. Secretary | Gou's private secretary |
| 6. Papa | Gou's father |
| 7. Marian | a clerk/typist |
| 8. James | a clerk |
| 9. Chuck Braggin-Crowe | businessman |
| 10. Vie Braggin-Crowe | his wife |
| 11. Saga | a university student |
| 12. Professor Noual | a linguist |
| 13. Mrs Ura Kava | a reporter |
| 14. Drllai Kamap | an academic |

Scene I

Early evening: in a dimly lit lounge, two armchairs, coffee table, on a sideboard left of stage a radio and telephone. Gou Haia sits in armchair, relaxing, reading Pacific Island Monthly. On right a mini bar, stage front left is set into a small verandah with hanging baskets and pot plants. Right door indicates front door, left door kitchen. Sinob sits in the other preparing a shopping list.

Sinob: *Gou darling? Do you prefer the plain or the stuffed Spanish olives? I'm just making up the shopping list.*

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Gou: (*Goes to the mini bar*) Oh, I don't mind, Sinob. Listen, leave that for later, have a drink. What would you like, vodka and tomato or something different?

Sinob: (*Sighs*) I'll have some Martini vermouth.

Gou: (*Gives Sinob her glass*) There you are dear. Cheers! (*Drinks his drink*) Ah, that's better. (*Sighs*) Well, what did you do today?

Sinob: Have you forgotten already? I've been at the New Amengo Embassy, organising that cocktail party. We're to raise funds for the Drop-outs. I'm on the committee you know.

Gou: Slipped my mind, that's right.

Sinob: (*Reminiscing*) It was just heavenly. Carpets wall to wall, air-conditioning - *and* a gorgeous indoor swimming pool. Oh, that reminds me. I had a letter today from Gloria. They've moved into our new PNG Embassy residence over there. And they have an indoor swimming pool too. (*Sigh*) Oh, *Gou*, perhaps one day we'll be in a position to get one. If ever you get that *promotion!*

Gou: (*Trying to conceal his emotion*) Perhaps. . . one day. Any new faces there - apart from the usual crowd?

Sinob: Not really. Just the usual. Mostly *nice* people, though. Oh yes, there was someone new. The wife of the managing director of Nirez. You know, the new perfume company set up by National Promotion. It will be just like the French perfumes. I suppose the fashion-conscious ladies of the city will be pleased. There were also some village women there. You know, mothers of the Drop-outs, and so on. Goodness knows why they asked *them* to come. They just sat by themselves in a corner and didn't say a word. Don't know how to behave at such functions.

Gou: But we must educate our village people. It's our duty to help the less fortunate.

Sinob: Quite frankly, I don't approve of it. Oh, by the way, I heard at the meeting that the PM is to form a new ministry. Is that true?

Gou: (*Whispers*) It's not official- so don't say anything yet. What's the time now?

Sinob: Nearly six o'clock. If that digital electric clock is correct.

Gou: I'd like to hear the news, if you don't mind.

Sinob: Oh, you don't want to hear that gibberish in Pidgin and Motu! Why not wait till the main news at seven o'clock in English? (*sighs*) Gosh, I'm feeling peckish - haven't had a thing since afternoon tea. (*Calls*) Pita! What's for dinner? Come in here.

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Pita: *(Entering from kitchen)* Yesa misis! Nau mi wokim rais, na kaukau, na pis na kokonas!¹

Sinob: Yuck! You can *eat* that! Make us a salad and grill the T-bone steaks. There's plenty of lettuce and tomatoes in the fridge. Hurry up now!

Pita: Yesa misis. Mi go nau.

Sinob: Wait a minute. I haven't finished yet. Now Pita, next time you ask me first *what* I want for dinner, *before* you cook native food. I can't stomach it. Now, take these glasses. We'll go out on the patio.

(Stands up) Come on Gou, darling, let's try out our new white iron chairs. Don't you think they're gorgeous. Bring us new drinks outside, Pita.

Sinob and Gou exit to the verandah.

Pita: Yes Misis! Yesa Misis! *(sighs and wipes his brow in frustration)* Bladi shit! Dispela em wanem kain meri? Em sindaun na singaut - "Pita! Pita!" Ahh! Dispela kanaka meri kamap wanpela waitpela misis stret!²

Pita takes this opportunity to take off the master and his wife. He sits down in the armchair, and with the rest of the drink that Sinob left behind, he crosses his legs and sits back, inhales the leftover cigarettes and coughs, he tries to cover his cough with the rest of the martini, this makes it even worse, he coughs some more.

Lights out

Scene Two

Sinob and Gou are holding hands on the verandah like young lovers.

Sinob: *(Angrily)* Pita for goodness sake, what are you doing with the drinks?

Pita: Sore Misis, mi kam ya! *(Pita takes the drinks out to the verandah)*

S: Man! Anybody would think you went to the brewery for the drink.

G: Actually darling, for spirits you go to the distillery.

S: Whatever, cheers for now anyway, you must have had a busy day.

¹ "Yes, missus. I've prepared rice, sweet potato, fish in coconut milk."

² "What kind of a woman is this? She is sitting down and shouts, 'Peter, Peter!' Ah, this bush woman is exactly like a white woman!"

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G: Oh, I had a very busy day, I'm afraid. Had a meeting with the Admin. staff at ten. Then the director called me in for a chat and coffee, then we went to a long lunch with the minister at the Lakatoi Hotel. We had smorgasbord. Nice turkey and ham.

S: So we've both had a busy day. (*Calls out*) Pita! Pita! How are the steaks? Don't burn them. I want mine medium rare. (*Pita enters*) Oh *there* you are. Well?

P: Kaikai i redi nau. Mi putim pinis long tebol. Nogut bai I kol.³

S: Bring the portable table out here on the patio. We'll eat here in the cool. Hurry up now, Pita. I don't want that steak to be spoilt.

G: I'll go and help him.

S: No. He's the servant. What do we pay him for? He's got little enough work to do. Sit down, dear.
Oh, I do like that rose-bush we got from the University garden lady. It's going to look lovely when it grows along the railing. Just like the one at Professor Noual's place. Oh, here's the food now, at last. Put them straight, Pita. And don't forget the napkins and the finger bowls.

P: Yes, misis!

G: The steak looks good. (*Helps himself to salad*) Like some salad on your plate, dear? (*Gives empty glasses to Pita*) Thank you, Pita, you can go now.

Sound of knocking on door

Gou: Oh, I'd better see who that is.

Sinob: No. You go, Pita.

Pita: Ye sah misis!

Sinob: Whoever they are can wait. It's very bad manners for visitors to come at mealtime. Hmm. This steak is lovely and tender, but I don't think I'd better eat it all. I've had too much. I'm not *really* that hungry, after all.

Pita comes back.

Gou: Yes, Pita? Who is it at the door?

Pita: Em kasin bilong yu. Hegame. Em i stap ausait.⁴

³ The food is ready now. I've put it on the table. Don't let it get cold."

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Gou: Tell him I'm having my dinner. Tell him I'll be with him when I finish.

Pita: Yesa masta.

S: Oh, these people! I suppose he's come for money. Man! You can't educate these people. You keep telling them we pay rent, electricity, food, servants and they still come begging. Tell him to go away, Pita.

G: *Maski* Pita! I'll go and see him. Besides, it's nearlytime for the news. Excuse me, dear.

S: But you haven't finished yet. *(Calls out)* Money doesn't grow on trees. We just paid four hundred kina for school fees, and besides, I don't know where I've put my purse.

Lights out

SceneThree

In the lounge. Hegame is hanging around the lounge waiting for Gou. Gou enters.

Gou: Oh, hello, cousin Hegame. It's been a long time since you have visited me.

Hegame: *(Scratches his head)* Sorry Gou, for this unusual visit. I know you are a busy man, but I had to come to you because there's no one else to go to. My wife's given birth to twins and I need to borrow ten kina, please. I'll be able to pay you back next fortnight when I get overtime pay.

Gou: Oh, cousin, I can only let you have two kina. This month I've got a lot of expenses. You know, bills. It's not easy living in the city. You village people are lucky because you have your own gardens to get food from. Here in town we have to pay for ours. You stay and have some food with us? Here's the two kina before I forget, and I err. . .

Sinob: *(Calling loudly)* Pita! Clear the table. Give the rest to the dogs.

Hegame: *(Embarrassed)* I - I - er - thank you, cousin, for offering food. But I - er - I ate before I came. I must go now and sorry for disturbing you Thank you, cousin.

They shake hands and bid each other good night.

Gou: *(Shakes his head in bewilderment)* Oh, I'm sorry,
Hegame: Good night.

⁴ "It's your relative, Hegame. He's outside:"

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Door closes

Sinob: (*Enters indignantly*) Well, where is he? Oh, he's gone eh? I couldn't help hearing what he asked for. I *knew* he'd come for money! How much did you give him?

G: Only two kina. Poor man. Remember he *is* my COUSIN.

S: Oh, I hate this *wantok* business! Look, we can't afford to flash our money around - not even fifty toea. You know how expensive things are. Don't be so soft, Gou.

G: Look, it only came out of my cigarette budget. I've never felt so embarrassed in my life. Telling Pita to clear the table and give the rest of the food to the dogs. I'd asked him to eat with us. And he hadn't gone out of hearing when you started accusing me of giving too much money.

S: I'm sick and tired of people coming here for money. This is not a Development Bank loan office. The whole reason we have this decent house is because of me. Do you understand? I made it possible for us.

G: That's enough, Sinob. One more word about it and I'll be out that door to the pub for some peace. (*Looks at his wrist watch*) Hey, it's time for the news! Switch on the radio, please. (*Sinoh switches the radio on*)

News Announcer: And here are the headlines: A new government department has been formed and the appointment of its first director has been announced. An increase in the number of crimes in the city has been attributed to unemployed school-leavers. Now the news in detail. The prime minister has announced the formation of a new department to be known as the Department of National Identity.

The new minister will be Mr Selep Rilai Ansi. The new director will be Mr Gou Haia. The spokesman added that this department will promote the image of the Melanesian way of life both here and overseas. The statistician announced today that figures for crime rates in . . .

(Sinoh rushes over and turns the radio off)

S: (*Kisses Gou*) Congratulations, darling! This is terrific news. Just what we've been waiting for!

G: Well, there you are. That's why I was waiting to hear the news. Director of the - Department of National Identity. How do you like the sound of that? This calls for a celebratory champagne. And we *must* have a party to really celebrate. I can't wait to tell everyone the news. Listen, Gou, can you get your secretary to come here first thing in the morning, to help me with preparations?

G: Sure. She won't mind.

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S: What do you mean? She won't mind. It's her job to assist in every way. Oh, there's so much to do. I'm so excited I can hardly think. I hope my new dress will be finished from the dressmakers. I'll probably need new shoes, and of course will have to get my wig set, and then there's the food and. . .

Lights fade...

Scene Four

Next day, mid morning in the lounge. Sinob is in a dressing gown, sitting in an armchair. Her hair is in a scarf, peering into a small mirror plucking her eyebrows. Pita enters.

Pita: Eskus Misis, wanpela kuskus meri i kam stap insait ya.⁵

Sinob: Tell her to come in here, Pita. I've been expecting her. *(Calling)* In this way, if you don't mind. Sit down.

Secretary: Thank you, Mrs Haia. I hope I'm not late. It's just ten o'clock now.

S: Oh, I've only just got out of bed. Now, get your pad and pencil. I want you to take this list down for your boss's celebration party. For his promotion, you know.

Sec: Yes, Mrs Haia. We are all very proud of his success. He's worked hard to get this.

S: Oh yes. But you know the old saying: "Behind every successful man there's a woman". Anyway, down to business.

Sec: I can take shorthand. You just dictate to me, Mrs Haia.

S: First, of course, the Minister for National Identity - Mr and Mrs Selep Rilai Ansi. I don't really like his wife - she's hardly more than a village woman - but still we must invite them both - it's only proper. Oh, don't write all that down.

Sec: No, Mrs Haia. I understand.

S: The managing director of Nirez, the perfume company, and his wife - Mr and Mrs Braggin-Crowe. They are terribly nice people. They're Americans. Oh, I do like the American accent. Do you know them?

Sec: No, Mrs Haia.

S: Oh well. Now, Mr and Mrs Maus Wara - he's in Information, just back from New York. Dr and Mrs Ilai Ikamap - the medical people. And, let me see, we should ask some nice academics from the university. Some of those Africans are smart. Ah yes, Professor

⁵ "Excuse me Mrs, there is a secretary to see you. She is waiting for you in the hallway."

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and Mrs Noual of the university. And that Mr. Saga - the young man who has been getting all that publicity. He's a bit radical, but everyone's talking about him.

Sec: What about people from your husband's staff?

S: Oh yes. I suppose they will have to come. . . How many so far?

Sec: That will be about thirty, including the office staff. Now, this party is to be on this Saturday night, is that right?

S: Yes. Get in touch with the catering people. I want the best of everything. Just like the Embassy parties, hot and cold savories, wines, mineral water, beer, everything. Order good glasses for the important people and plastic cups for the office staff.

Sec: Betel nuts, Mrs Haia?

S: Of course not! There are never any at the Embassy parties. Make all those invitations out to be sent today. Get Mr Haia's driver to deliver them before lunch time today. You better come back and show me the catering list this afternoon. Right, I'll have to ask you to go. I have an appointment at the hairdresser's.

Sec: *(Takes a bow at Sinob)* Yes, Mrs Haia. Good morning. *(She exits)*

Scene Five

It is early evening about seven o'clock. Gou is pacing waiting for Sinob to emerge from the bathroom.

Gou: *(Calls toward the bathroom)* Hurry up in the bathroom, dear, it's almost seven o'clock. The first guests will be arriving about eight.

S: *(Emerging rather flustered)* I was just fixing up my make-up. Don't rush me, Gou. These false eyelashes are hard to set.

Doorbell rings

Gou: Oh gosh, there's someone already! I haven't even got my shirt on! *(calls)* Pita! Leave what you're doing in the kitchen and answer the door, I'm going to the bedroom.

Peter runs out the kitchen door to the front door and opens it.

P: Ah! Papa yu kam a? Kam insait.

Papa walks inside and he and Pita greet each other by lifting both hands up and give high ten.

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Pita: *(Calling excitedly)* Masta! Papa ikam.

Sinob comes out to take a peak, upon seeing papa goes out onto the verandah fuming, passing Gou.

S: Gou, it's your father! Why has he turned up now? Just as we're flat-out getting ready for our party! What a time to come! Make it clear that we're entertaining very important people tonight.

G: Shh! Sinob, he'll hear you. *(Calls out)* OK, Papa. Come inside. I'll be out in a minute.

Papa: Eh! Pita! Pren bilong mi. Man! Mi kam longwe, na mi les liklik.⁶

Pita: Eh! Papa... Na yu sindaun long dispela sia. Pikinini bilong yu i kam nau⁷

Papa: Man! Mi no inap sindaun long sia, mi sindaun long graun tasol. *(Sighs)* Ahh! Em nau!⁸

Gou: *(Enters)* Father! How are you? We – er - weren't expecting you.

Papa: Eh! Pikinini bilong mil Yu tok Inglis. Na mi traim tok olosem.⁹ You house here, it long way too much up road to mountain. My bones tired of walk. Now, I find you is good.

G: Father, I have been promoted. I'm to be the director of the Department of National Identity. Do you understand?

Papa: Pikinini, yu tok wanem long dispela? Mi no save. Yu tok Inglis, na mi no kisim as long tok bilong yu.¹⁰

G: It means I'm to be the boss of a big office. The number one boss.

Papa: Numba wan, eh?

G: Yes. Tonight, Sinob and I are having a party to celebrate. *(Calls)* Pita, bring some food for Papa, please.

Pita: *(In kitchen)* Yassur!

Papa: Ahh! Mi amamas tru long dispel a toktok. Na yu bairn pik bilong wokim dispela singsing ah?¹¹

⁶ "Peter, my friend! Man, I've come a long way, and I'm a little tired."

⁷ "Papa, sit down on this chair. Your son is coming."

⁸ "Man, I'm not sitting on a chair. I only sit on the ground. Ah, there we are."

⁹ "Ah, my son, you speak English. I'll try too."

¹⁰ "Son, what are you talking about? I don't understand. When you speak English I can't get to the bottom of what you say."

¹¹ "I'm very happy about what you say. Will you buy a pig for the singsing? "

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- G: No, Papa. It's not a singsing. Its - well – a *party*, where people come to drink, eat biscuits, olives, peanuts, and talk. Then maybe dance a little bit. In town this is called a cocktail party.
- Papa: Ah, kokitel patio Olgeta taim mi save harim dispela kokitel patio Mi tingim em pulim tel bilong kakaruk! Tasol em wanpela kain singsing laga; ah! Na, dispela opis bilong yu - ol i kolim Nasem Andenti - em wanem samting?¹²
- G: You mean National Identity? Yes. . . Well, it means - er - something like knowing ourselves – what we really are. Samting bilong yumi yet.
- Papa: Na bilong wanem yu no salim pas I kam long ples? Na mama na lain bilong yumi kisim planti kaikai. Mi kilim planti pik na kisim buai. Mi amamas tru long mekim bikpela pati bilong yu!¹³
- G: Tenkyu tru Papa! But - I - I must now do things in the way of the town. This is the way things are done here. It would not be right if we had a feast here in town.
- Papa: Ah! Pikinini bilong mi! Ol man bilong ples bai lap long yu, sapos yu no wakim singsing. Ol i bai tingim yumi rabis man.¹⁴
- G: This party is the town's way. My friends come from Australia, England, and America, and we must do things to please them.
- Papa: Maski pikinini! Em i tingting bilong mi tasol! Yu wakim long lain bilong yu, na wantaim pren bilong yu.¹⁵
- G: Papa. You go with Pita to the bathroom and wash. Pita will give you some clean clothes of mine. Then you come and see the party. But Papa, my wife doesn't want us to chew *buai* here. But there's plenty of beer and cigars. Pita will look after you... (*To Pita*) Pita, will you show Papa the shower in your house?
- Papa: (*Moving off*) Tenkyu. Tenkyu tru.
- G: (*Calls*) Sinob! Come out here, please.

¹² "I always hear about this" cocktail party". I wonder are they pulling the tail of a cock? But I think it's a kind of dance, isn't it? And this office of yours, *Nasem Andenti*, what is that?"

¹³ "Why didn't you send a letter to the village? Your mother and your relatives have lots of food. I would kill a lot of pigs and I have betel nuts. I would be really happy to make a big party for you!"

¹⁴ "All the people in the village will laugh at you if you don't make a feast. They'll all think we two are poor people."

¹⁵ "Never mind, my child. That was only an idea of mine. You do things according to your own way and that of your friends."

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- S: *(Enters)* Where is your father? Did you tell him?
- G: He's gone with Pita to clean up and change clothes, then come to the party.
- S: To the party? The last thing I wanted was for your father to stay for the party? What will the people think? You'd better introduce him – and say he doesn't speak English. Tell him not to smile either. His teeth are as black as the bottom of a village cooking pot!
- G: That's enough, Sinob! Tonight is supposed to be happy. And besides, I didn't ask the old man to come. Anyway, you had better understand that we still have a bond between us and the village people, despite the fact we rarely visit them. It is the proper thing to do.
- S: All right. But I'll hold you responsible for any disasters that might happen tonight. Don't forget that.
- G: What about Papa's things here on the table?
- S: Pita! Pita! Quick time! Gou, you go to the bedroom and finish getting dressed.
- G: *(Exits)* All right, Sinob. But don't forget what I said.
- Pita: Yes, misis.
- S: Take these things outside *(Pointing to Papa's things)*. Bring a can of air freshener and spray this room out. It smells like Koki market. Use *all* the spray if you have to. Just get rid of the smell – understand? Hurry up now. . .
- Pita:** Yes misis . . . *(He takes the spray and sprays on the table, under the chair and above his head and twirls around with the spray)* Ah! Dispela meri olgeta taim tok klinim, klinim, wok, wok! Wanem kain ya? Mi les long dispela kanaka misis. Em winim misis kwin pinis!¹⁶
- Papa walks in clean, refreshed and smiling with a feather and flowers in his hair.*
- Pita:** Ah! Papa yu kam a? *(Laughs)* Ah! Man yu luk namba wan! Klinpela tru!"¹⁷
- Papa:** *(Grins)* Tenkyu Pita, yu wok long pikinini bilong mi, a? Yu tink wanem? Em gutpela man, laka?"¹⁸

¹⁶ "Yes, madam. Oh, man! This woman always says: clean, clean! Work, work! What is all this? I am tired of this bush madam. She thinks she is bigger than the queen".

¹⁷ "Ah, Papa, are you coming? You look marvelous. Really neat!"

¹⁸ "Have you worked long for my son? What do you think of him? Is he a good man?"

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Pita: Ah! Papa! Masta Gou - em gutpela man. Meri bilong en i no gutpela tru. Mi no laikim em. Olgeta taim i save kros nating tasol.¹⁹

Papa: Mi no laikim en tu! Olgeta taim i save kros long pikinini bilong mi na i save toktok planti!²⁰

Gou enters.

Pita: (*Whispering*) Eh, Papa. Maski! Tupela i kam nau. Nogut tambu bilong yu i rausim mipela. Mi go long haus kuk!²¹

G: How are you feeling now, Papa?

Papa: Very good. Gutpela waswas. Mi amamas tru.²²

Sinob walks out of the bedroom and crosses to the verandah.

Sinob: (*Calls out*) Gou! Come out here on the patio, please.

Papa: Yu go lukim meri bilong yu.²³

G: (*Fluffing up a cushion on the chair*) You sit down there, Papa, and rest for a while. (*Moving off*) Yes, dear, I'm coming. (*On the verandah*) Well, what is it now?

If you want to know what happens in *Scene Six*, get a copy of Nora Vagi Brash's book in our University Bookshop!

¹⁹ "Master Gou is a good man, but his wife is no good. I don't like her. She is angry all the time."

²⁰ "I don't like her either. She is always angry with my son and she talks too much."

²¹ "Never mind, Papa. They are coming now. I don't want your daughter-in-law to give me the sack. I'm going to the kitchen."

²² "I have a good wash. I am really happy now."

²³ "Go and see what your wife wants."