

Love Letter To The Soldier

This is a video letter from a Papuan woman to an Indonesian soldier who was once based in her village on the PNG-Indonesian border. There was a controversial relationship but she begs him to return to meet their three-year-old daughter: "I will continue to wait for you, Samsul. I don't care what people say." Samsul had courted Maria Goreti Mekiw, visiting her house every day and giving gifts of biscuits and milk until the two started a relationship. Maria was still a high school student, and she found the TNI soldier 'polite and kind'; she thought that they were to be married. Instead Samsul left when Maria was five months pregnant and has not been in touch since, failing to respond to Maria's letters.

It has been a tough time for Maria, her parents are getting old and she is burdened by having to look after three year old Yani by herself. People discriminate against Maria and Yani because the father is an Indonesian soldier and has abandoned them. Yani is called an 'army brat', and is mixed-race in a village of predominately Melanesian Papuans. Maria is still hopeful that Samsul might return and would welcome him if he does, despite this being an unlikely possibility.

Issues: gender, military, war, sexual violence, community, remote living

Talking points

- 1 What are your thoughts about entering into a relationship with a TNI soldier? Should the Indonesian government and military force Samsul to accept responsibility for his daughter? Why?
- 2 Do you think that what has happened to Maria is emblematic of the structural problems caused by stationing soldiers in remote villages, or is it just the story of two people in a failed relationship?
- 3 Do you think that the other Papuans are being racist when they call Yani a 'army brat' or do you think that they are criticising Maria for having a baby out of wedlock with an Indonesian soldier? What similarities are there in your community?

