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## 6 • PSYCHOTHERAPY AT THE BORDERLAND

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I startle as Mrs. Siaka loudly and repeatedly pounds her fist on the desk that separates us in the consultation room. She screams at me: “Stop saying that! Stop saying things are going to be okay. Things are not going to be okay. I have been struggling every day for the past few years, and things have been getting worse. I am tired. Look, my body is giving up on me. I am tired. I want to be there for my children tomorrow. I want them to remember me as a strong woman, as a mother who supported them.”

Mrs. Siaka came to France from Cameroon in 2012. She traveled alone, pregnant with her fifth child. Back home, she was a busy, independent woman who trained as an athlete and worked as a coach. She even participated in national competitions. During one consultation, she told me her husband would often complain that she was too busy; she even spent some weekends away from home, when she participated in tournaments with her team, although she took her children along.

Mrs. Siaka was born to a Christian family, but her husband was born Muslim. They had a daughter born out of wedlock, and for some time they lived with Mrs. Siaka’s parents. Mr. Siaka then decided to convert to Christianity, after which the couple married and later moved to Yaounde. Mr. Siaka’s conversion created tensions between Mrs. Siaka and her in-laws, who were convinced that Mrs. Siaka and her parents had pressured him to convert. The couple had two more children, a boy born in 2002 and a girl in 2005. When Mrs. Siaka became pregnant with her fourth child, her in-laws started pressuring her to have her daughters undergo genital cutting. She vehemently opposed this, and as the pressure grew stronger, Mrs. Siaka fled to her parents’ home. For a while her husband visited her and the children on a regular basis, but he failed to convince her to go back with him. To make ends meet, Mrs. Siaka began to trade clothing with neighboring Nigeria. At the end of 2011, during one of her trips, she met a man, James, a clothes supplier, with whom she had an affair. She became pregnant and attempted to get a medical abortion but failed. Her parents insisted that she keep the child.