

### Family Honor and Abuse

>A conversation with an Afghan woman in St Louis who has been working in a clinic that seeks to help people recover from the trauma of war in their home countries. Many of the women have indeed been deeply traumatized by events that took place in their homeland. My contact has been surprised, however, at how many of the Afghan women have been traumatized by their own relatives. Events behind the compound walls can be deeply wounding. An example: A Pushtun woman from one of the eastern provinces had resisted allowing herself to be tattooed, a practice required of married women in that region. Eventually her husband's family, with whom she was living, lost patience with her and forced her to be tattooed. Her mother-in-law bound her hands and they restrained her as they tattooed the telltale marks on her face – four dots on her forehead and dots above and below her lips. The instrument was apparently septic and it caused her face to swell up; she was unable to eat for days. She survived but was deeply shaken by the ordeal. In her clinical sessions here she repeatedly expressed remorse and shame that she was tattooed. Eventually, the clinician came to realize how deeply the experience was to her, and was able to arrange for the tattoo to be removed by cosmetic surgery.

>When I was living in Kabul in the 1950s I was single and fresh out of college. Across the street lived a family with three children, about the ages of 13, 12, 11. The 11 year old was a very pretty girl, I thought. The father was a lower echelon diplomat in the Foreign Ministry; he had in fact been assigned to Washington for a couple of years; I remember his explaining to me how perceptive Muhammad had been to forbid the consumption of pork, as it turned out to be especially vulnerable to disease in hot climates. After I left Kabul I lost track of the family. Years later I met a young woman of the same name as the pretty 11 year old daughter of the diplomat I had known across the street in Kabul. I happened to ask her if she could have known that girl, as they were about the same age. She said she did know her and told me what had happened to her: She had gone to Kabul University after graduating from high school and there she fell in love with a young man and they eloped. Eventually she returned home to see her family. With her in the house her father turned up the stereo so that the neighbors would not hear what he would do, and he then shot her dead. Family honor.