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Paratsoukli: Institutionalized Nicknaming in Rural Greece

KALYMNOS IS SMALL, only 49 square miles in area. The population, however, is one of the densest in Greece. The island, located 90 miles north of Rhodes in the Dodecanese, is almost solid rock and unarable scrub land. Its population of over 14,000 persons (about 300/square mile) has long been supported by the ancient industry of sponge fishing. This industry is characterized by danger and adventure and by the six months absence at sea of its members. Semiliterate sponge divers may earn over \$ 2,000.00 for their six months of labor, two and a half times the annual earnings of a laborer of comparable socio-economic status.

In the past (before the advent of the synthetic sponge) the enormous wealth of this small, inconspicuous place generated an élan of independence and intransigence towards outside rulers. In 1948 the Dodecanese (twelve islands, including Kalymnos, with Rhodes as the capital) were returned to the Greek political sphere by the United Nations. Before that Kalymnos had been occupied by Genoese, Maltese Knights, Turkish, Italian, and, during WW II, German rulers. For most of those 600 years of foreign (non-Greek) rule, Kalymnos was listed as a "privileged island" in historical records. She was allowed self-rule and self-taxation, paying only tribute to her various rulers. Indeed, this "*privileged*" status goes back to the fourth century B. C. when Kalymnos was part of the privileged hegemony of the Rhodian empire. Rhodes turned her back on the quarrels between Athens, and Sparta. She ignored the massive disputes between the Alexandrians and the Ptolemies. Instead of lending her maritime military machine to political parties she formulated the first marine sea laws which emphasized free passage for commerce on the high seas; and she stood behind those laws by policing the Aegean and fighting pirates with her triremes. Standing as she did for freedom of commerce (even between belligerents), Rhodes and her little empire were left free and untouched, a privileged domain until Roman times. Kalymnos was part of that domain and Kalymnians still exhibit a spirit of virility, independence, and recalcitrance against foreign domination which strikes even the most casual, journalistic observer.

Sponge fishing and an exciting history has made Kalymnos unique in the sense that any ethnographic example is unique. Kalymnos is generally Greek, specifically insular Greek, more specifically Dodecanesian in culture, and most specifically only like herself. (More detailed description of Kalymnos may be found in Bernard 1966, 1967, 1968.)

In this paper¹ we will examine a particularly interesting Kalymnian custom,

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that of nicknaming². The use of sobriquets is widespread in rural Greece; it is especially conspicuous on the islands; and there are several unique "twists" in the custom found on Kalymnos. The folkloric literature is filled with reports of nicknames in use among various peoples of the world. (For a sample, see the Bibliography) Apparently, the custom is worldwide. Interest, however, has usually been in the superficial aspects of nicknames, such as their surface meaning, their provenience, and etymology. Only a few authors (see Allen, 1956, and Spencer, 1961 for example) have been concerned with the social functions of nicknames in specific ethnologic contexts where the use of pseudonyms forms a conspicuous cultural tradition. Such is the case in Greek society where nicknaming is practiced as far more than a quaint pastime.

IN ANGLO-AMERICAN SOCIETY (except for certain sub-cultural groups such as thespians and underworld members), nicknames are ephemeral, childhood artifacts, sometimes of little or no descriptive significance, which evoke amusement if used among adults. This is not true for Greece, however, where people acquire nicknames at any age (though usually in childhood); where the names are always descriptive of life-cycle events or personal characteristics; and where pseudonyms may replace the baptismal name entirely - even accompanying a man to his grave through the priestly eulogy.

The word for nickname in Greek is (Παρατσούκλι) *paratsoukli*. It derives from Turkish *Tsoukli* (a pot) and Greek *para* (near, against) probably meaning a "handle" in this context³. The mere mention of the word *paratsoukli* evokes knowing smiles from native speakers of Greek, since its meaning goes far beyond that of a substitute label for individuals. A host of social functions may be involved in any particular nickname.

The widespread use of nicknames in Greece probably originated, or was at least nurtured by three major factors: (1) the lack of systematization of Greek surnames until

2. "Nicknames" in this paper refers specifically to that class of names in Greek culture derived from complete onomastic neologisms or usages, rather than to the class of onomastic modifiers. This class of modifiers consists of *Hadzi-* (a man who has made at least three trips to the Holy Land), *Kara-* (a dark-complexed man), *Pappa-* (a priest), *Gero-* (an aged man), *Dimo-* (a man who is respected by the common people), and one or two other prefixes, as well as a few suffixes such as *-oglou*, *-opoulos*, and *-idis* meaning "of or belonging to", "the son of." Thus, there are hundreds of last names such as *Pappaiannis*, *Karaiannis*, *Hadziannis*; and *Pappaiannopoulos*, *Karaiannopoulos*, etc. These are not considered here to be nicknames in the strictest sense. An example of what may (and does) occur in Greek names using common affixes is spelled out in Footnote 4.

3. The allusion to a handle for a nickname was also common on the American pioneer frontier. The question "what's your handle?" was translated as "By what name do you prefer to be called?" There is, of course, no historical connection between the two uses of the word "handle" to mean nickname. A significant difference in usage should also be noted. Nicknames in Greece are always "other-acquired", while nicknames on the American frontier were often "self-acquired." Greek nicknames are often derogatory and, as a result, are not part of the public domain, at least insofar as the nicknamed can help it. On the American frontier men often took nicknames in order to obscure their names and any connection to a less than unquestionable past which might be gleaned through public knowledge of their real names. There was real survival value in the question "What's your handle?" in the American Old-West. One did not press a man to reveal his baptismal and family names. By contrast, one does not ask a Greek if he even *has* a nickname. Such knowledge is acquired only through long association.

comparatively recent times; (2) the practice of naming after saints; and (3) the pattern of alternating patronymy-matronymy in Greece.

In the first instance Greek surnames were apparently not formalized in ancient times or even in the Byzantine eras. This was especially true on the islands where self rule was often the case. The Ottomans (according to local tradition), in an effort to make their bookkeeping simpler and to expedite tax collection, insisted on the use of formal last (and even middle) names. Until that time nicknames had served as secondary identifiers: John Crooked-Nose, John the Stutterer, etc. This sort of thing (using nicknames as locatives) was further reinforced by the second factor above. Children are baptized with names of saints; and though the corpus of such names is more than 400 only a few very popular ones are chosen. The number of Johns, Nicholases, and Dimitrioses in the Athens telephone directory is totally beyond "normal" expectations.

The most important factor is the third. For here not only do we get a large number of men with the same name in a community, but they may be all paternally related first cousins. Under such conditions not even surnames would serve to separate them from one another. Thus, it is the custom in Greece to name the first son after his father's father, the second after the mother's father; the first daughter after the father's mother and the second daughter after the mother's mother. Some permutations on this exist, but basically the pattern holds: the first two sons and daughters automatically inherit baptismal names. Even with formalized surnames, therefore, there might be four or five John Pappases - all first cousins, and all the first born sons of the sons of a common paternal grandfather. In the systematization of family names on the islands in the last few hundred years middle names were introduced to identify people who would otherwise have been confused. In a great many cases last names and middle names were derived from current nicknames. This accounts for the fact that most surnames in Greek have substantive or compound meaning⁴.

Even with formalization of names, however, sobriquets continue to arise throughout rural Greece, especially in the islands. This indicates that nicknames must serve more than a simple identification function. The intensive study of Kalymnian nicknames revealed eight identifiable distinctive features of continuing significance:

1. Nicknames have locative value as personal identifiers.
2. They are always descriptive of one of three things:
 - a. outstanding or unusual physical characteristics;
 - b. peculiar, humorous or obnoxious behavioral characteristics;
 - c. unusual, humorous or outstanding events in a man's life.
3. Those belonging to category 2c above are often acquired by mature persons. These are relatively rare, however: most pseudonyms are coined in childhood.
4. They are not ephemeral but follow a man throughout his life, even to the grave.
5. They are transitive over time and space in that they are inheritable. They

4. Compound tongue twisting names are legion in Greek. One almost legendary name should suffice as an example: John Hadzikarapatriandafilopoulos is John the son of a dark-complected priest named "Rose" who made at least three pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

are transferred from a husband to his wife and from a father to his children according to specifiable linguistic modification rules and may even be translated into other languages.

6. They are usually rejected in their early stages of existence but often become a kind of prided, incorporeal property.

7. Nicknames are usually part of the masculine cultural domain, though some Kalymnian women have taken them.

8. Nicknames actively serve at least two important social functions:
- a. as mechanisms of societal integration; and
 - b. as mechanisms of social control.

WE WILL EXAMINE EACH OF THESE EIGHT FEATURES IN MORE DETAIL.

1. Nicknames still retain their most obvious function on Kalymnos. Many instances were noted of men who could not be easily located without reference to their nicknames. Some men sign legal contracts using their "real" name, while placing their pseudonyms in parentheses directly below. The postmaster of Kalymnos indicated that occasions arose in which he could not deliver a letter to the addressee until the man's nickname was discovered. A number of cases were reported, in fact, of men who changed their surnames legally so that these might be congruent with their *paratsouklia*. One such case was attributed to a man's incapability of conducting business with his "real" name. In spite of the fact that he despised his nickname it was particularly funny and well-known. He insisted, however, on using his "real" name, especially in correspondence with business clients from Athens and other islands. When clients sought him out on Kalymnos, however, they often could not find him, became discouraged and left. Sales were lost until the *paratsoukliasmenos* (nicknamed man) accepted his nickname legally. Though this story is suspiciously apocryphal and definitely part of Kalymnian folklore, its very existence indicates the importance of the *paratsoukli* in local culture.

2. A survey of Greek nicknames indicated that most are used (at least initially) to poke fun at people. They usually deal with a person's most conspicuous physical characteristics such as obesity, distorted facial features, big feet and the like; or with personality and behavioral traits such as loquacity, stuttering, stinginess, meanness, egotism, fussiness, etc. The name *Koutsoufi*, for example, is carried by all the males of a particular family because of their large noses. The *koutsoufi* is a bird that has an exceptionally large beak. Another nickname referring to a bird is *Koukoubas*, or "owl". This man was a shepherd who habitually rested against a certain rock in the mountains of Kalymnos several generations ago. He would place his hood on the rock and sit staring wide-eyed into space. His wide eyes and habit of staring won him his nickname which his descendants have since legalized.

Sometimes the names may be even more alliterative. The name *Axajtis* means one who gulps things down, and refers to greediness and lack of concern for others. *Fasaria* literally means "trouble." The fault of the man who bears this sobriquet is that he carries stories and rumors of inconsequential topics from person to person.

While most nicknames are of the kind described above many refer to strange or

embarrassing incidents in a man's life. One poor fellow migrated to the United States and complained that the streets in Cambell, Ohio were too steep. The word for steep is *katiforos* which he pronounced *katirifos*. For some reason the metathesis was very funny at the time and the name *Katirifos* remained with him, following him back to Kalymnos later on. Whatever the provenience of these nicknames, one aspect ties them together: they are capricious and are in an ironic, joking spirit designed to make the bearer as uncomfortable as possible for the great good humor of those around him. Some names, however, are a source of great pride for their bearers, stemming as they do from genuinely outstanding circumstances. During the early 1900's a Kalymnian sponge diver was almost swallowed by a giant shark. Though he suffered permanent scarification of his body, he lived and became known (for obvious reasons) as *Jonah* (Jonah).

3. Nicknames tend to develop early in childhood among siblings and playmates. They may arise in adolescence or adulthood, however, especially among very good friends. Here again, the object seems to be humor at another's expense and discomfiture. In the case of nicknaming among children, parents (especially mothers) actively discourage the coining and use of nicknames among siblings. They point out to their children that if a name "sticks" and becomes widespread it may permanently harm a brother (or sister) with regard to social popularity, job getting ability, etc.

In spite of these exhortations by parents, however, children utilize nicknames amongst themselves as a revenge technique. Not insignificantly, many nicknames were found to have been coined by younger brothers or sisters for older brothers. Children are fairly insensitive to harm they might bring about. Children under stress can often be fairly sadistic. On the other hand, children are not imperceptive and insensitive to non-physical (i.e., social) harm done them. They react violently, vociferously, and with a passion that one describes only as "childlike."

Mothers tell their children not to pay any attention, not to resist being given a nickname. They tell them that resisting only creates fun for others at their own expense. And of course this is true. But what child can stop himself from resisting being made the fool? It is no accident that most nicknames begin and take hold in childhood.

4. Several instances were noted, however, of nicknames being coined in adulthood. In one instance three young couples who had all moved to Athens on business had come together for dinner and an evening's social chat. In the middle of the conversation one of the men flatulated loudly which caused some laughter. The wife of his friend thereupon named him *Dynamitis* (dynamite) in honor of the occasion. The nickname was considered hilarious by all concerned, except of course by Mr. *Dynamitis* — who managed to accept the sobriquet with grace. Several months later a son was born to Mr. *Dynamitis* and at the baptism party the same couples were again present. The coiner of the nickname was the godmother of the boy. She jokingly referred to the boy at the post-baptism party as *Dynamitakis* or "little Mr. Dynamite." The boy's mother pleaded with her friend not to use the name again. If it got back to Kalymnos, she reasoned, it might take hold and do irreparable harm to the boy's future.

The rules of provenience for nicknames conform closely with those of use. As we have shown, nicknames originate either among siblings or childhood playmates,

usually in a malicious manner; or among close adult friends as a good-natured joke. Similarly, established pseudonyms may be used maliciously or in a friendly manner, depending on the situation, the personnel involved, the tone of voice, etc. Young people call their elders by *paratsouklia* only at their peril, while elders may often use a youngster's nickname either as an insult or as a term of endearment.

5. This brings us directly to the several aspects of transitivity of nicknames. They may be inherited from father to son or daughter (patronymy) by simple application of masculine and feminine noun diminutives. In rare cases they may be passed from mother to children (matronymy) by the same rules. Finally, nicknames are taken by wives from their husbands (maritonymy⁵) according to rules of simple noun feminization. Table 1 shows how this works. Column 1 contains a man's nickname; column 2 the referential name(s) of his daughters; column 3 the referential name of his sons; and column 4 the referential name of his wife. In this way nicknaming does not follow the general rule for the construction of Greek names:

± Affix + Word ~ Name derivative ± Affix + [/s/ ~ /ou/]

Thus, in the example above (see Footnote 3) Hadzi- and Kara- are affixes denoting some special aspect. Next occurs a word which may be a common lexeme or one used primarily in name construction. Next there may or may not appear another affix such as -Poulo or "son of." Finally the ending /s/ (masculine) or /ou/ (feminine) must be added to the name⁶. In the formation of nicknames feminine or neuter nouns may be used for males: i.e., *Sphika*, feminine, "wasp"; *Trapezi*, neuter, "table." The diminutives or feminizations are added directly to the nickname as shown. Thus, the masculine diminutive -akis is added directly to feminine nouns such as *sphika*.

In considering the inheritance of nicknames it should be emphasized that referential, rather than addressive, names are important. Because of the stigma attached to most nicknames and the special circumstances of extreme malice or extreme fami-

TABLE 1

Rules of transitivity of Greek nicknames

Nickname	Feminine Diminutive	Masculine Diminutive	Feminization	Meaning
sphika glaros	sphikoula glaroula glaritsa	sphikakis glarakis	sphikaïna glarina	wasp seagull
lelekis axaphtis raptis	lelekitsa axaphtoula raptoula	lelekakis axaphtakis raptakis	lelekina axaphtaina raptaina	stork gulper tailor

5. I have introduced this neologism here at the risk of unnecessarily proliferating jargon in order to complete an otherwise standard paradigm of teknonymy, patronymy and matronymy. The very widespread custom of a woman acquiring her husband's name (albeit the family name) is, as far as I am aware, unlabeled in ethnographic literature. In this case especially, where the woman receives her husband's second given name (his *paratsoukli*), the occasion calls for the introduction of a new term. I suggest, by the same reasoning, that if cases of name transfer are described as going from a wife to a husband that this be called uxonymy.

6. Some masculine names end in /ou/ however, as *Papandreou* the former Prime Minister.

liarity necessary for their use, they are usually heard only as referents. After puberty most girls lose even their referential patronymic pseudonym while boys take on the nickname itself, dropping the diminutive suffix "-akis." Thus the nickname becomes truly transitive over generations. In some cases a son may even acquire his own *paratsoukli* without abandoning that of his father.

Nicknames are transitive over space as well as over time. The custom was brought in its entirety to the New World with Greek migrations to the United States. The practice was found to be quite prevalent in Tarpon Springs, Florida, a Greek community composed mainly of Kalymnians. That community of overseas Greeks was formed in 1906 as a sponge fishing center which flourished until just after WW II when a sponge disease and the advent of synthetics wiped out the industry there. Among first generation Greeks nicknaming was very common, especially among the sponge fishermen. Among 2nd generation Greeks the custom was weaker and had transferred to English. Men in their 40's were commonly called by their pseudonyms names such as Snowball (so called because his hair was white as a youth), Pop-Eye (a man afflicted with a hyperthyroid condition), One-Eyed Mike (for obvious reasons) and Co-pilot. This last is particularly interesting. The man was originally named *Kopeli* in Greek. The word means a boy servant but in sponge fishing lingo refers to someone who dives as a novice and is paid only 35% of his catch. Professional divers in Tarpon Springs receive a share or two shares of the value of the entire crew's catch. This man was so good that he made more money remaining a novice than he would have made becoming a professional. For two years he managed to get away with staying a novice and received the nickname *Kopeli*. The English speaking Greek-Americans in the sponge fleet renamed him Co-pilot because it sounded like *Kopeli* and made linguistic sense.

Other examples abound. Mr. Katirifos above received his nickname in the United States from Greek speaking Greek-Americans. Another man named *Klonaris* was nicknamed *Fatolitis* after a particular flower he wore in his ear on Kalymnos. He carried the name with him when he migrated to Tarpon Springs in the early 1900's. His sons also became known as *Fatolitis*. One of these became a business man who had the same unfortunate experience described earlier. On several occasions clients from Tampa, Florida (a nearby city) came to Tarpon looking for a Mr. Klonaris who was apparently non-existent in Tarpon Springs. After losing several such clients Mr. Klonaris legally changed his name to *Fatolitis*. Since the switch was not made on Kalymnos the author found paternally related first cousins of the *Fatolitis*es there still named *Klonaris*.

6. As noted above (point 3), most nicknames are acquired in childhood and are rejected by those unfortunates who receive them (the *paratsoukliasmENOI*). While vociferous avoidance of nicknames is expected behavior at the early stages, however, most sobriquets become a source of pride in time. This is especially true when they have been inherited over several generations. Most such nicknames are those of the "incident" variety. Those who carry the nicknames may look back upon an illustrious ancestor with some pride. The nickname itself and any folklore associated with it become the incorporeal property of the man's descendants.

Such a man was Mr. Kid-Goat who received that name four generations ago

during the Turkish period of Dodecanese rule (Circa 1525-1912). He had, the story goes, a flower garden bordering on his neighbor's property. The neighbor had a very young kid (*tragos* in Greek) which insisted upon eating the man's flowers. He complained to the woman next door who refused to do anything about the affair. Finally he threatened to kill and eat the kid if it transgressed again.

Two days later the man caught the kid eating his flowers. He summarily killed it, wrapped it in blankets, and placed it in the *kunya* (the special hammock-like child's cradle used in Greece in his house).

The woman, upon seeing her kid had disappeared, summoned the police and told them of the man's threat. The police confronted the culprit and asked if he had killed and eaten the kid. Whereupon the man pointed to the hammock and said "I'd just as soon kill and eat that baby swinging in the *kunya*. I swear on this baby's life" he said, placing his hand on the blanket wrapped bundle, "that I did not do it." "Not even the Turks", the story ends, "would refuse to believe an oath such as that". From then on the man became known as *Tragos*; all his sons were called *Tragos* and so on. Today on Kalymnos there is a tavern song many verses long which describes other, wholly fictional, anti-social, prankish exploits of this man.

7. One of the really distinctive features of Kalymnian nicknames is the fact that they may and do sometimes occur among women. In most of rural Greece sobriquets are part of male culture. Aside from the fact that masculine and feminine cultural domains are fairly discrete in traditional, island Greek society women did not need nicknames as secondary identifiers in the way men did. This was so for at least three reasons: (1) Through the practice of patronymy girls were easily referred to by their first name plus the diminutive feminization of their father's nickname; i.e., Maria I Glavitsa, Mary the daughter of the man called sea-gull. (2) Girls marry quite early, practically before they have a chance to lose their feminized patronym. This, coupled with (3) the practice of maritonymy insures women plenty of identification mechanisms.

Generally, the masculine emphasis of nicknaming holds true for Kalymnos. But in this, as in other areas of cultural life, women enjoy a much greater participation in male activities than elsewhere in Greece⁷. One old woman was named Kaliora, literally "good hour." She used this unusual expression as a response to the familiar greeting *kalimera* (good day). The idiosyncrasy earned her a nickname which she could not transfer to her nicknameless husband (uxoronymy was not found to exist) but which she did transfer to her eldest son who in turn gave it to his sons. The name now refers to any member of the patriline in the family generated by the woman's eldest son. The name depicts an amusing, warm and colorful trait of a luminous ancestor.

Other women, however, are not so fortunate. They receive nicknames which are amusing to everyone but them. One woman was named *Sphaka* (not to be confused with *Sphika* above) or "freckle-faced." She was very embarrassed by this name

7. The peculiar position of women in Kalymnian society results from the existence of the sponge fishing industry. The fishermen who dominate the island's economics are gone six months of each year. Since life must go on, many ordinarily male activities are performed by women. For a more complete account of this phenomenon, see Bernard 1966.

but succeeded in getting married in spite of the trouble it caused her. In other cases women have been nicknamed with various epithets indicating their loose moral character. One instance was reported of a woman whose family paid great sums of dowry money to compensate a groom for the stigma attached to his wife's *paratsoukli*.

8. In all the points presented so far a number of real social aspects beyond that of a simple identification mechanism have been evident. The smooth functioning of a social system depends upon the acceptance of behavioral norms by at least a majority of its members. Roles must be played out according to the expectations of others. It is expected, for example, that persons re-baptized with a nickname should react strongly against it. When they do react in this way, the completed cycle of expectation and behavior acts as an integration mechanism between and among the protagonists in the social drama. In effect, it establishes a role relationship between the namer and the named. Since the namer represents a much larger corpus than himself (the society), the "proper" reaction by the named serves to publicly reiterate the correctness of the particular social customs. In a way, parents are expected to react against this kind of behavior in their role as parents. When they discourage their children from reacting against nicknames so that they do not "stick to them" they, too, are acting in the expected mode according to their status as parents. In this way the custom of nicknaming is woven into the social fabric of Kalymnos.

IN CONCLUSION, THE USE OF NICKNAMES ACTS as both a mechanism of social control and as one of societal integration. Since a survey of actual nicknames would probably show only a few as being of type 2b above (referring to obnoxious behavioral traits), we must conclude that the threat of being given a nickname is more potent than its actual occurrence. The same is probably just as true for the well known institution of female gossip in all peasant communities on record. The fact that nicknames are so common on Kalymnos (as elsewhere in rural Greece), and that almost all sobriquets are matters of humor rather than of disdain, indicates that nicknaming is a powerful mode of intra-societal cohesion. Nicknames are, in short, a matter of community recreation. Only an intimate knowledge of local culture can give one entree into the humor of a given pseudonym. Only a Kalymnian knows the story of the stolen kid which makes the name Mr. Kid funny. Only a Kalymnian would know of the embarrassment of Mr. Dynamite when he flatulated at a social gathering. Only a Kalymnian would understand the meaning and humor of the word *dynamitis* in this case. Only Kalymnians would understand that the name *Anthropara*, which means a great and strong man, is applied sardonically to a particular man who everyone knows has a very inflated opinion of his own physical prowess; and so on. The use of nicknames among Kalymnians is a regular mode of humor which allows them to identify with one another as members of the same social group. This is why so many nicknames are alliterative rather than simply descriptive.

In a more general sense nicknaming on Kalymnos may be viewed as part of a larger set of integrating, self-identifying mechanisms. In gross terms Kalymnos is Greek; but it is somehow more like the mainland. Carrying this further, Kalymnos is more like the Dodecanese Island group of which it is a member than it is, say, like

the Cyclades or the Ionian Islands. In the sense that every ethnographic example is unique, however, Kalymnos is a world unto itself. On the neighboring Dodecanese island of Kos the men wear white kerchiefs - a practice the Kalymnians think of as effeminate. Kos is agricultural, while Kalymnos' economy is based on sponge fishing. The Kalymnian dialect is distinctive; its history is, by definition, unique; its architecture is immediately distinguishable; its houses are all painted blue and white and gold; even the shape of the mountains and valleys are somehow etched into every Kalymnian's consciousness. This is the stuff the dreams of expatriates are made of. Nicknaming is just one more piece of equipment in the solidarity machinery of Kalymnos.

Finally, and by way of summing up, there is an inverse relationship between the size and discreteness of Greek communities and the strength of the custom of nicknaming. The custom is strongest in very isolated, small mountain villages and in the rather self-contained island societies of the Aegean. Nicknaming lacks vigor and color in the larger cities and towns of Greece. In small communities, it is suggested, nicknames act as a source of in-group humor and, consequently, as a social integration factor.

Furthermore, nicknames may act as a powerful mode of social control. They verify and constantly remind their bearers of their own socially unacceptable characteristics. By making such things as stinginess, rumor mongering, the persistent use of vulgar language and other anti-social characteristics the butt of constant joking, society continuously reminds itself of what it considers good and bad behavioral traits. This too, allows people of small communities to reaffirm their common belief that they belong to the only truly right world.

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