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Stirring Up Skyr: From Live Cultures to Cultural Heritage

In recent years, the Icelandic dairy product skyr has been transformed from an everyday staple to a national food heritage. Skyr is high in protein and low in fat, and its nutritional value accounts for its international success. However, the domestic and international marketing of skyr glide effortlessly from medieval literature to modern healthy living in promoting skyr as a unique, wholesome, and authentic product: heritage food and Iceland's "secret to healthy living." In this article, we explore how skyr has been recontextualized as heritage through the cultural staging of skyr-making and through branding efforts. It was not until skyr had become a standardized export commodity that people began to fear that action was needed to protect the traditional way of skyr-making. Picking up on the trend of "heritagization," pioneered by Slow Food (which added skyr to its "Ark of Taste") and by small farmers catering to tourists, industrial skyr producers have come around to narrating the cultural history of skyr, employing heritage branding to carve out a unique place within the global dairy-scape. We untangle the messy relationships between the local and the global in such heritage efforts by examining how global trends and markets influence people at local levels, impacting the way they think about and act on their own cultural forms, and how the local level, in turn, impacts global flows under the sign of heritage.

Keywords
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It fueled the exploits of Vikings and farmers for generations. Imagine what it could do for you.[1]

SKYR IS A THICK, SOUR DAIRY PRODUCT FROM ICELAND. Its history can be traced back for more than a millennium. It is also a newly minted heritage food, and its heritagization is the subject of this article. Over the past few years, skyr has been transformed

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from an everyday dairy product to food heritage, marketed as such at home in Iceland and abroad. This transformation has assigned skyr a new position within the cultural landscape and a distinct place on the dairy shelf through an attempt to create novel associations between producer, consumer, place, and product. Such production of multiple and complex cultural contexts—or the commercialization of cultural and historical references—has come to play an ever-expanding role in alimentary customs in the contemporary world (Amilien, Torjusen, and Vittersø 2005; Jönsson 2013; Köstlin 1998; Pétursson 2013, 2018; Tschofen 1998, 2008, 2017).

Skyr is produced by heating skimmed milk, then cooling it again before adding live bacterial cultures to make the product coagulate. Traditionally, the bacterial culture came from a pinch of skyr from the previous batch, deliberately conserved for this purpose. After culturing, skyr is strained to remove the watery whey, making the final product creamy and rich in texture. Although it is commonly referred to as a thick yogurt, technically it is an acid-curd cheese. Skyr is high in protein and low in fat, and its nutritional value accounts for its newfound international success within a low-fat, high-protein consumer culture.

The story of skyr as heritage contributes to growing scholarship on cheese-heritage-making in Europe and North America (Grasseni 2011, 2012, 2017; May 2013; Paxson 2008, 2010, 2013, 2014; Petridou 2012; Tschofen 2008, 2017; West 2020). Based on her ethnography of Alpine cheesemaking in "the heritage arena," Cristina Grasseni notes that the reinvention of cheese as heritage depends on "continuous intervention, including commercial tactics, symbolic politics and the pervasive performance of a culture of discernment (gustatory, sensorial, historical, genealogical, geographic, agronomic and culinary)" (Grasseni 2017:6). This description aptly captures the transformation of skyr into heritage, as domestic and international skyr producers try to establish bonds between people, places, and products. Moreover, Austrian folklorist Bernhard Tschofen remarks that many European cheese varieties owe their newfound appreciation as traditional or heritage products to growing global attention to local and regional specialties (Tschofen 2017:120–5; May 2013). In this article, we contribute to this scholarship by focusing on how the global heritage branding of skyr redefines locality and adds value to the product.

From the age of settlement in the 800s and 900s until the twentieth century, Iceland's economy was predominantly a pastoral farming economy, with sheep as the primary livestock and hay the principal crop. Dairying was a major occupation within this economy, and animal products provided the bulk of people's daily food, with dairy accounting for an important proportion. The most valuable food produced in the dairy was butter. Skimmed off the top of the milk once it settled in its containers, the best way to conserve cream was to churn it into butter. As salt was always in short supply in Iceland, this butter was usually cultured (or soured) for conservation (Gísladóttir 1999:65). Sour butter could be preserved for up to 20 years, and tenant farmers could pay their rent in butter. Laborers' wages were sometimes paid in butter, and butter could be exchanged for other goods from merchants.

However, for each liter of cream skimmed off the top of milk, 9 gallons of skimmed milk are left over. Skimmed milk, in other words, is a by-product of butter-making.

To make skyr was to add value to this by-product and preserve it before the invention of refrigeration. It also improved both taste and texture. At room temperature, skimmed milk could become both bitter and unsafe within a few days; heating milk and replacing bad bacterial cultures with good ones is one of the more important innovations of pre-industrial food safety technology (Jönsson 2005).

From the age of settlement to the present day, skyr remains a common staple in Icelandic households. Over the last few years, it has also become part of a global market of health foods with a traditional touch. It can be compared to other popular and traditional strained dairy products like Greek yogurt and quark. The international marketing of skyr glides effortlessly from Icelandic medieval literature to modern healthy living in an attempt to promote skyr as a unique, authentic, and wholesome product. Food producers and businesses, as well as the global tourism industry, have spotted an opportunity for profit in marketing their products with reference to temporality and spatiality, through concepts of tradition and heritage on the one hand, and place and the local on the other. Narratives and images are conveyed through advertisements, labeling, and packaging, setting the scene for new forms of engagement between producers and consumers. In this essay, we seek to lay bare the messy relationships between the local and the global in such heritage efforts to show some ways in which global trends and markets influence how people at local levels think about and act on their own cultural forms, and how the local level then impacts global flows. Here, we explore discourses and practices that have redefined skyr as cultural heritage in the twenty-first century, and how this new cultural context has transformed the production, marketing, and consumption of skyr at home and abroad. In turn, we ask what the empirical analysis of skyr can tell us more broadly about heritagization processes.

Methods and Material

This article is a part of a larger ethnographic project in which we explore the cultural history and current making of skyr. It is the first article in a trilogy. The second article will focus on the changing relationship between microbes, gender, and health in skyr production and consumption over the past 100 years. The third article will follow skyr as it departs from the shores of Iceland in the twenty-first century to conquer new markets abroad, ending up in dairy aisles, trademark offices, and courtrooms, in what we call the "Skyr Wars." The material for the project was gathered through multi-sited ethnography and in-depth interviews, archival research, and multi-website netnography in order to track skyr through time and space. We explore how skyr circulates through different contexts as it travels the food value chain from production to consumption. Paul Willis and Mats Trondman (2002) have pointed out the importance of conjoining ethnography and theory to be able to produce a concrete understanding of social contexts. An ethnographic study should be "theoretically informed" (Willis and Trondman 2002:395). In this article, we use the concept of heritagization as an analytical tool, but we also use the concept to guide our selection of empirical material.

The discourse of cultural heritage highlights some parts of the food chain while obscuring other parts. For example, as skyr travels the food value chain, it sometimes gets detected on the heritage radar while flying under it at other moments. Thus, the empirical material consists of ethnographic snapshots of skyr that are shaped by the discourse of cultural heritage. Following a brief historical sketch, the article considers skyr's rebranding as heritage in the twenty-first century after being an ever-present and unremarkable part of the Icelandic diet for more than a millennium.

This article relies, in part, on three recent, in-depth interviews that Jón Þór Pétursson conducted in 2018 and 2019 with a dairy farmer and dairy scientist, a product developer, and a food scientist; the first of these follows up on an earlier interview and Pétursson's participant observation on the Erpsstaðir dairy farm conducted in 2009.[2] The fieldwork thus spans a decade, and a great deal has happened with skyr during that period.

The Making of Modern Skyr

In Iceland, skyr has long been a household staple that is eaten on its own, mixed with porridge, served with whey, or eaten with cream for festive occasions. Berries picked in August were sometimes conserved in skyr for the autumn months. As there was little cereal cultivation in Iceland, and firewood was in scarce supply throughout the centuries, skyr was the principal alternative to both bread and porridge and was sometimes mixed with the latter. Likewise, the fermented whey that skyr-making produced as a by-product (through straining) was an everyday beverage mixed with water. Until the mid-twentieth century, this whey was the only alternative to a glass of water for most days of the year. As cereals had to be imported, beer was only consumed on festive occasions. But whey was also an important conservation medium, an alternative to salt, which was always in short supply. All sorts of meat and offal were pickled in whey; the great acidity of which had the added benefit of softening even the toughest foods (Gísladóttir 1999; Sigurðardóttir 1985; Pétursdóttir 1960). Its usefulness was such that some argue that skyr was, in fact, the by-product of whey-making, not the other way around: a by-product of a by-product.

We grew up in Iceland in the last quarter of the twentieth century eating skyr for breakfast or lunch many times a week, usually stirred into milk for a smoother consistency and with a bit of sugar on top to sweeten the naturally sour taste. It was also served as a dessert, stirred in with cream, sugar, and blueberries. Skyr was the most commonplace of foods: healthy, tasty, effortless, easy to serve, easy to eat, and easy to digest. It is a simple food; it demanded neither skill nor time nor historical consciousness.

Our skyr was not homemade and was not from the dairies of individual farms, where skyr-making and other dairy work was historically the domain of women and required both skill and experience.[3] The skyr that we grew up on was, for the most part, produced under the supervision of dairy scientists in the country's four largest dairy cooperatives, two in the southwest—in the capital city of Reykjavík and the neighboring agricultural town of Selfoss—and two in the biggest towns in the North—Akureyri and Húsavík. The dairy industry came into being in the 1920s. Home production of

dairy foods, such as skyr and butter, was time-consuming, and the depopulation of rural areas after the turn of the twentieth century left less labor available for such tasks. Dairy cooperatives solved the dilemma for farmers. They could produce these products in more economical and efficient ways in more densely populated areas. A law passed in 1934 by a left coalition government led by Framsóknarflokkurinn (the cooperative farmers' party) gave a monopoly on dairy distribution to such local farmers' cooperatives and outlawed private dairy companies.

New production methods and declining home production of skyr meant that differences in taste and texture between farms and regions diminished steadily throughout the twentieth century. As the twenty-first century dawned upon the Icelandic countryside, the home production of skyr had almost completely disappeared. A study conducted in 2010 found that a mere three farms out of over 3,000 in the country still produced their own skyr (Valsdóttir and Sveinsson 2011). In our youth in the 1970s and 1980s, there were still a number of dairy cooperatives, each with slightly different equipment, techniques, and microbial cultures, not to mention the different farms and cows that supplied milk. Hence, skyr was produced with subtle differences in texture and flavor. None of it was quite like the skyr of the former centuries, and all of it had progressively been altered and adjusted through innovations in dairy science and microbiology, the rationalization of work, the industrialization of production, the regimentation of the bacterial flora, and the standardization of the product. However, these had not yet taken the same form everywhere, as will be revealed in another article we are currently co-writing, "Mother Cultures: Skyr Microbes, Dairy Maids and Super Women." Local dairy cooperatives had already begun to merge in order to build bigger and more efficient regional units, further advancing standardization and reducing variation. This process of mergers and acquisitions gathered momentum in the 1990s and into the early 2000s. In 2006–2007, the remaining cooperatives, one in the South and one in the North, merged under the label MS Iceland Dairies, which has since had an effective monopoly on dairy production in Iceland.[4]

Alongside the restructuring of the industrial dairy sector, fundamental changes were made to the production and distribution of skyr. In 2001, MS Iceland Dairies introduced a new brand into the domestic market, marketed as "a new generation of skyr." It was a deliberately modern brand at the cutting edge of innovation, signaled through its name, "Skyr.is" (Dagblaðið Vísir 2001:9). This was during the heyday of the dot.com economy, and adding the country domain extension ".is" was meant to convey its adaptation to the lifestyles of a new generation of health-conscious millennials on the go.

Skyr.is was marketed in single-serving containers of 170 grams with a plastic spoon attached to the lid, rather than the standard 500-gram family container. It came in four different flavors, none with the old, familiar, sour taste of skyr. While sweet-flavored skyr had been marketed prior to this time, the varieties had, up until this point, been limited to adding blueberries or strawberries to the skyr prior to packaging, in keeping with an older tradition of preserving berries in skyr. More flavors soon followed, all with added sugar or artificial sweeteners. At the time of writing in 2021, one can buy vanilla skyr or skyr with peaches and raspberries, none of which grow in Iceland.

"The Traditional Recipe Is Complex"

Sensing danger, the Slow Food Reykjavík Convivium, the local chapter of the international eco-gastronomic movement, mobilized to preserve skyr and succeeded in registering skyr on Slow Food's Ark of Taste in 2007. The Ark of Taste travels around the world, searching for small-scale, local products "that belong to the cultures, history, and traditions of the entire planet" and that members of Slow Food believe to be endangered by "industrialization, genetic erosion, changing consumption patterns, climate change," and so on. The Ark's aim is to save these products from the deluge of mass production via their rediscovery, supporting producers, and telling their stories in an attempt to help the food find its way back into people's kitchens and onto their dining tables.[5]

The Reykjavík Convivium was concerned that the definition of skyr had been confused by all the changes in the production process. Its members were convinced of the economic and cultural potential of traditional skyr and believed that these possibilities ought to be highlighted through increased production, promotion, and development. As a first step, however, the convivium deemed it urgent to safeguard traditional skyr to prevent its extinction. It is precisely this context of urgency that created the need to define what traditional skyr is.

"The traditional recipe is complex," notes the home page of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity before it provides a step-by-step description of the correct method for making traditional skyr and concludes with an enumeration of what distinguishes the traditional dairy product from its industrial counterpart. This traditional recipe is certainly complex, but we would suggest that its complexity may have more to do with the task of definition than the actual process of making skyr. According to historical accounts, there was no specific traditional recipe; this accounts for the great variation in both its taste and texture (Gísladóttir 1999:67–8). It is only through the heritagization of skyr that a standard definition of a traditional recipe came into being. Although the Slow Food movement's goal is to safeguard and promote biological, cultural, and gastronomic diversity, Slow Food's definition of traditional skyr and of the recipe for its making actually introduces a heritage standard and a stock narrative. As we will see, industrial producers have appropriated this narrative to legitimize cultural claims in the branding and marketing of their own products.

Although the recipe for traditional skyr may be complex, it betrays a clear and simple conception of what it is not. Slow Food emphasizes that the main differences between traditional skyr and its industrialized counterpart are, first, the use of a pinch of older skyr to make a new batch, and, second, a lengthy preparation time due to older methods of straining. To make skyr the old-fashioned way is, therefore, to slow down the process, an antidote to the frantic pace of modern life and the industrial food system.

Through this definition of traditional skyr, the microbial cultures emerge as the bearers of tradition and guarantors of historical continuity. Preserving skyr to make new skyr, giving the bacteria a new lease on life in a new batch of skyr, the dairy product is anchored in past cultural traditions while slowly guiding the present toward the future. Folklorist Henry Glassie proposes defining tradition as "the creation of the future out of the past" (1995:395). Indeed, the future is precisely the point at issue

here. The following appeal appears in a beige frame next to the recipe for traditional skyr: "The challenge to save biodiversity is not just any challenge. At stake is the future of the planet and the human race. Join us and do your part: support Slow Food."[6]

If life must be lived forwards, it can only be understood backward, as Søren Kierkegaard reminds us. Before the definition of the recipe for traditional skyr and its appeal to support Slow Food and save the world, the home page of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity thus begins by placing skyr in historical and cultural context:

> Skyr, a fresh acid-set cheese made from cow's milk, has ancient origins. It was already an integral part of the diet of Iceland's first settlers over a thousand years ago, and Icelandic families have been making it at home since time immemorial. The cheese is mentioned in medieval sagas, and traces have been found during the archaeological excavation of medieval farms.[7]

Attentive readers will notice the convergence between the story of skyr as told by Slow Food and the story as told by Iceland Provisions in the quote that opens this article: "It fueled the exploits of Vikings and farmers for generations. Imagine what it could do for you." Both appeal to consumers by anchoring skyr in a millennium-long tradition dating back to Iceland's settlement. The medieval (Viking) sagas provide a *terminus ante quem* before which skyr-making must have begun and a literary context for its marketing, as one of our interviewees made clear. A product developer at MS Iceland Dairies, Björn Sigurður Gunnarsson, who has taken an active part in developing skyr for international markets over a long period of time, explained:

> One of the things we've been working with is this history of skyr and how we can create a cool frame for its export by recounting its history. We've seen, during this expansion of markets, that people are very much interested in that. People are actually quite surprised; not many know that skyr is particular to Iceland and that its history is so long, right from the beginning of settlement here. . . . This history and the connection to the Viking period—we can even quote the old Icelandic sagas—people totally fall for that. . . . We have promoted skyr widely, and at trade conferences, we have recounted how it is a traditional food mentioned in several of the Icelandic sagas. We haven't analyzed it in any detail, but it is mentioned in a number of sagas. (interview, February 18, 2019)

Indeed, reference to the medieval sagas is a staple of skyr's international marketing, and not only by MS Iceland Dairies. Sometimes, two to four of the best-known sagas that feature skyr are mentioned by name, the *Saga of Egil*, the *Saga of Grettir the Strong*, *Ljósvetninga Saga*, and *Sturlunga Saga*. The marketing stops short, however, of retelling any relevant episodes from the sagas, and no wonder. The eponymous protagonist of the *Saga of Egil* takes such offense at having been served skyr when his host, named Armod, had better food in the pantry that, after first quenching his thirst on strong ale, Egil

> stood up and walked across the floor to where Armod was sitting, seized him by the shoulders and thrust him up against a wall-post. Then Egil spewed a torrent of vomit

> that gushed all over Armod's face, filling his eyes and nostrils and mouth and pouring down his beard and chest. Armod was close to choking, and when he managed to let out his breath, a jet of vomit gushed out with it. (*Egil's Saga* 2004:156)

Not exactly the darling of marketing departments, Egil sat back down and asked for another drink, blaring out in verse: "With my cheeks' swell I repaid / the compliment you served" (*Egil's Saga* 2004:156). In other words, he was displeased with the hospitality and sent the meal back to his host. Perhaps the least flattering review of skyr from any age, this account does not feature in any skyr advertisements we have come across.

That the discourse of tradition in the marketing of skyr involves a good deal of cherry-picking is hardly unexpected. In the words of Raymond Williams, tradition is "a deliberately selective and connecting process which offers a historical and cultural ratification of a contemporary order" (1977:116), in this case, a cultural legitimation of the product or "a cool frame for its export." In his presidential address to the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society, Dell Hymes suggests that we would do well to understand the notion of tradition not as rooted in time but rather in social life, that tradition is a process rather than the product of the past. Hymes calls this process "traditionalization" and observes that "it seems, in fact, the case that every person, and group, makes some effort to "traditionalize" aspects of its experience" (1975:353). Building further on Hymes' suggestion, Richard Bauman argues that, from this perspective, tradition is "a symbolic construction by which people in the present establish connections with a meaningful past and endow particular cultural forms with value and authority" (1992:128). Such cultural forms include commercial products, and indeed the social actors traditionalizing these products include marketing departments. To invoke tradition is thus to give meaning to actions and objects in the present, to connect them to other people and places and times, and to charge them with emotion or affect.

Slowing Down Skyr

Of course, this applies not only to the invocation of tradition by big dairy but by big and small players in the agricultural economy "who reinvent their relationship with tradition" (Grasseni 2017:28). Thus, subsequent to the successful listing of skyr on the Ark of Taste, Slow Food established a presidium, or local committee, around traditional skyr in 2015, with the aim of preserving the traditional recipe. The presidium emphasizes the protection and promotion of small-scale farmers and producers to help them survive within a new rural economy but "also wants to encourage the development of gastronomic tourism focused on the ancient food traditions still found around the country."[8]

Three producers belong to this presidium, Erpsstaðir Creamery in the West of Iceland, a family farm about which we have more to say below; Egilsstaðabú in the East of Iceland, a large family farm with a café, boutique, and guesthouse; and Skaftholt farm in the South of Iceland, an organic/biodynamic sustainable farm and home for people with developmental disabilities. With the presidium project, Slow Food acts as

an intermediary between producers and consumers and tries to establish connections between different producers. The presidium promotes their products by telling the story of skyr, its makers, and the area it comes from. In adding the listing of traditional skyr to the Ark of Taste and creating a presidium to preserve and promote the product, Slow Food locates skyr within a new cultural context as heritage, a context that emphasizes difference over standardization.

In the valley of Búðardalur in the West of Iceland lies the dairy farm Erpsstaðir.[9] The farmers are Þorgrímur Einar Guðbjartsson and Helga Elínborg Guðmundsdóttir, both middle-aged with family roots in the Dalasýsla district. Þorgrímur is a dairy scientist by education who used to work for MS Iceland Dairies in Búðardalur. However, he and his wife Helga were interested in homemade products, and in 2006, they began expanding the farm. When construction was completed in 2009, the Erpsstaðir Creamery began operating, creating conditions to reduce the distance between producers and consumers, a move contrary to the centralization of dairy production over the previous 100 years.

When expanding, the couple designed the cowshed to receive tourists and provide them with a firsthand experience of the production process. On a guided tour, visitors are led through the barn, where they can snuggle with the calves while watching through a glass window as dairy robots milk the cows. From there, they stroll over to the next window, which displays the making of skyr and ice cream. Finally, they can round up the experience by sitting down and relaxing in the café while enjoying the food whose production they have just witnessed.

In 2009, the farm began producing ice cream and selling it in their farm shop. The skimming of cream for the ice cream left large quantities of skimmed milk as a by-product. To begin with, the skimmed milk was fed to the calves, but soon Helga and Þorgrímur decided to try their luck with skyr-making. Production of ice cream for tourists thus created the Erpsstaðir skyr as a by-product for added value, a relationship much like that of butter production to skyr-making in previous centuries.

The skyr from Erpsstaðir is called Sveitaskyr (Country Skyr). Þorgrímur explains in an interview in 2018 that he uses the same methods as when he worked as a dairy scientist for MS Iceland Dairies in Búðardalur in the 1990s. The milk is heated and cooled down before a pinch from the previous batch of skyr is added to the new batch. Then the skyr goes into a cloth bag and is strained overnight. But things got off to a shaky start:

> When I began in 2009–2010 to make my own skyr, I didn't succeed in making it coagulate. After several failed attempts, I discovered that MS Iceland Dairies had started to pasteurize its skyr, something that was not done when I worked there. The reason they started to pasteurize the skyr was to make it last longer. Instead of [a] two-week shelf life, like it used to have, it lasts four weeks. As a result, you don't have these live cultures in the product anymore. (interview, March 6, 2018)

Previously, the first step in skyr-making was to heat the skimmed milk, not so much to kill unwanted microbes (this was a pre-Pasteurian practice) as to denature the milk proteins in order to assist the skyr bacteria in binding them together later in the

process, as part of the curdling of the milk into skyr. However, the company had killed off the live cultures by pasteurizing the skyr a second time at the end of the production process. This made it impossible to start a new batch of skyr with a pinch of the previous one. There simply aren't sufficient live cultures, or sufficiently live cultures, in MS skyr to breed and survive in a new batch. Industrial production had literally killed a living cultural tradition.

Þorgrímur finally got a skyr starter by buying a tub of the brand Óhrært skyr (unstirred skyr), which continues to be made with a pinch of skyr from the previous batch without the final pasteurization. He still resorts to it on occasion, especially in winter. When the demand drops, Þorgrímur makes less skyr, and his bacteria don't always survive from one batch to the next. On such occasions, Þorgrímur grabs a tub of Óhrært skyr in the nearest supermarket and starts the process over.

Mother Cultures

The MS Iceland Dairies monopoly produces four brands of skyr in 44 product variants of different flavors and sizes.[10] Óhrært skyr is one of these, a specialty item produced without flavorings irregularly and in modest quantities in an industrial dairy in the North of the country with late twentieth-century production methods. Björn Sigurður Gunnarsson referred to this production "in the old way" with "mother cultures" as a risky business:

> We are still making that sort of skyr, but . . . it could never be an export. There is too much at stake, too much risk with all the amount of milk used. But we do safeguard these old production methods and traditions with the old centrifuges and all that. But *Óhrært skyr* is not sold abroad. Its shelf life is very short; it is only a fortnight. It is a product that has a difficult time, but it is nice to have it on the domestic market, so we have kept it. (interview, February 18, 2019)

It is "nice to have" old-fashioned skyr in small quantities on a domestic retail market, where the 2-week shelf life doesn't pose a serious problem, stocked as a heritage alternative next to the mainstream product on the dairy shelf in the supermarket refrigerator. Indeed, when Björn began working for MS Iceland Dairies, he was appointed to serve on the company's heritage board. Among other things, this heritage board curated a small museum at the company's headquarters in Reykjavík that documents and represents the company's history, beginning with its predecessors in the creameries that antedated the various local dairy cooperatives at the beginning of the twentieth century. Besides producing dairy products, MS Iceland Dairies thus also produces the cultural and historical context for their production.

The live cultures in Óhrært skyr, also produced by MS, provide part of that cultural and historical context. Within MS Iceland Dairies, a conscious decision has been made to safeguard older production methods in a small dairy in the North of the country as a form of heritage that exists in parallel to the modern production. "Old-fashioned" skyr is "nice to have," as Björn puts it; it exists in the present, but it is not of the present. It has become a market niche with interesting prospects. Indeed, Björn's erstwhile boss,

Einar Sigurðsson, managing director of MS from 2009 to 2015, noted in a public radio interview in 2013 that there was great interest in further developing old-fashioned skyr as a product, "especially with the tourism sector in mind" (*Morgunútvarpið Rás* 2 2013).

Tourism and Local Food

Product development of old-fashioned skyr is thus related to the expansion of tourism, an export sector industry that does not depend on a long shelf life. Instead of exporting the product, the consumers are imported. Expansion is not a term that does justice to the growth rate of tourism in Iceland. The number of foreign visitors in 2018 was 2.3 million, nearly five times as great as it was in 2010 when there were 488,000 and when estimates predicted a modest rise to 760,000 by 2020 (Óladóttir 2018). For a population of approximately 360,000, that is a radical change. All of those visitors have to eat while in the country. Among other things, this has expanded the market for skyr with new consumers who take a different sort of interest in the product, to whom it represents local flavor and a way of experiencing local culture by tasting and ingesting it. Under these changing market conditions, the production of skyr's cultural and historical context has taken on new urgency.

MS Iceland Dairies has signed an agreement with the real estate development company Sigtún, which is currently constructing a so-called new old town center for the small town of Selfoss. Some 40 miles from the capital city, Selfoss played a central role in the twentieth-century history of the dairy industry and today houses most of the production of MS Iceland Dairies. The new old town center is an urban development project with 35 new buildings on a large, central lot, each with the reconstructed façade of a historic building from somewhere in Iceland that, at some point, was destroyed by fire or fell into disrepair (Jónsdóttir 2018, 2019). Its two most ambitious building projects are a wooden cathedral "unlike anything you have ever seen," a hypothetical building conceived as a monument to the wooden cathedrals of unforested medieval Iceland, and a reconstruction of the old Selfoss dairy of 1929, a building designed by Iceland's most famous architect, Guðjón Samúelsson, but torn down to make way for a bigger industrial dairy building in the 1950s. The reconstructed dairy will house a food court, art exhibits, and events, and, above all, the House of Skyr, an "immersive experience of the healthy Icelandic food, its history and heritage, with the added value of tasting a variety of skyr products and other surprises."[11] The importance of House of Skyr is not to be underestimated, as stated on Sigtún's project website:

> We have great confidence in an exhibition on Icelandic skyr and we believe it will attract a number of visitors every year. There is a vast variety of museums and exhibitions around the world that display food culture in diverse ways. There are milk museums, beer museums, wine museums, and so forth. A skyr museum will be the first of its kind.[12]

The current managing director of MS Iceland Dairies, Ari Edwald, explained in an interview in 2018 that "the idea is for visitors to walk into a world of skyr where they

will get in touch with the history of the white food that kept Icelanders alive since the settlement era, be introduced to food traditions from the settlement cuisine to that of our times, and get to taste skyr in various forms" (Fréttavefur Suðurlands 2018). It has long been the intention of MS, he added, to "create some kind of domicile for skyr in Iceland as an anchor in our export of knowledge to the international market." It is a part of "the long-term marketing strategy based on a well-defined brand" (Fréttavefur Suðurlands 2018). That's where the House of Skyr fits in, to strengthen the storytelling behind the brand, as Edwald spelled out:

> We are currently in 15 countries. We have made it our goal to be in 22 countries in four or five years. But, I suspect things will go even faster than that. In fact, all the countries in the world may be involved. It is in this context that we are interested in creating an international home for Icelandic skyr in Selfoss. (Fréttavefur Suðurlands 2018)

There is an interesting logic that the managing director makes explicit; the localization of skyr is a part of the international marketing strategy. The export of skyr, in other words, creates its local identity as a by-product. The branding of skyr as particularly Icelandic began with the surge in tourism but continues with the marketing of MS skyr for consumers in 15, or 22, or 200 countries. Building a distinct brand identity from competitors on the international dairy market, skyr's localization adds value to the product. A part of this brand construction is a furbishing of history and a "symbolic recalibration" (Grasseni 2017:8) of skyr as a national heritage food.[13]

Skyr Heritage: Theaters of Authenticity

In the neighboring town of Hveragerði, not even 10 miles from the construction site for the (new) old dairy in Selfoss, stands a building erected as the country's first skyr processing plant, at least in one half. The other half was a public meeting house. Designed for the local dairy cooperative and the municipal council by the same renowned architect as the Selfoss dairy, the *Skyrgerðin* (Skyr Factory) opened in 1930, but it has been home to various restaurants that have come and gone since the 1950s. In 2016, a new owner refurbished it as a restaurant and guesthouse, reinstating the *Skyrgerðin* name. The history of the house is front and center since the new owner installed old-fashioned skyr-making equipment in the middle of the building, where the restaurant makes cloth-strained skyr. "We are going to show our guests how skyr is made and give them a taste of it, so we offer historical and gastronomic tourism," explained the owner, entrepreneur Elfa Dögg Þórðardóttir. She added that "we have an elegant guesthouse, a beautiful bistro, and finally skyr production again, which is nice since skyr is making it big all over the world" (Fréttavefur Suðurlands 2017b).

Visitors to the Skyr Factory are offered a 30-minute guided tour where they can learn about "the full history of skyr making from our master skyr maker, taste different types of skyr, and see some of the old equipment that was used to make skyr in the past" (Fréttavefur Suðurlands 2017a). Appropriately enough, the master skyr maker in the Skyr Factory is actor and chef Erlendur Eiríksson, who has over a dozen IMDb

(Internet Movie Database) credits to his name. As the owner puts it, "you might say we take full advantage of his strengths because a visit to the Skyr Factory should be an experience for the mind, the hand, and the taste buds at the same time" (Fréttavefur Suðurlands 2017a).

In a fascinating ethnography of the reinvention of cheese in the Italian Alps, Cristina Grasseni notes that "the notion of tradition mobilizes a veritable theatre of authenticity whose audience anticipates and participates in the performance" (Grasseni 2017:3). In the towns of Selfoss and Hveragerði, this theater constructs an old dairy as its stage. The traditional tools and artisanal techniques of skyr-making are interpreted with elaborate stage and museum technologies, crowned by the tasting experience, a gastronomic ethnography of skyr.

Sliding a step down the food supply chain from restaurant to farm, we find farmers who have adopted another approach to staging the authenticity of the skyr they offer for consumption. From the reconstructed industrial dairy façade in Selfoss and the refurbished skyr factory in Hveragerði, we move into the barn itself. Some 30 to 40 miles farther inland, and only 15 minutes from Iceland's most popular destination of the Geysir hot springs area, the siblings who own the dairy farm in Efstidalur added a guesthouse, a horse rental, a restaurant in the hayloft, and an ice cream barn to their parents' farm in 2013. The ice cream production is ambitious, offering guests fresh-made Italian-style gelato with an assortment of flavors, all from cows that one can admire and pat while eating ice cream made from their milk. Much as in the case of Erpsstaðir above, the ice cream production in Efstidalur leaves a great deal of skimmed milk as a by-product, from which the farmers make skyr. Their skyr can be bought to take home in old-fashioned parchment packages and is served as a starter or dessert in the hayloft restaurant, literally overlooking the cows in the barn so that "you can watch the cows eat their hay while enjoying refreshments."[14] One wall in the restaurant consists entirely of windows into the barn, a fourth wall in the theater of authenticity that both interested diners and curious cows break with their mutual gaze.

As a site of culinary tourism (Long 1998, 2004), the Efstidalur ice cream barn and hayloft restaurant is a site of contact and encounter that is produced through "a collaboration between highly self-conscious producers and consumers" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004:xi–xii) around an experience in which the farm becomes an exhibit of itself, cows, farmers and all. As you take your leisure and lick your cone, "you can watch the farmers at work, farming and making ice-cream, cheese and skyr."[15] A startling juxtaposition, this staged production of the full food supply chain is an example of what, following Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "might be called the tourist surreal" (1998:152).

Senior Citizens in the "Skyr Lounge"

As in the Skyr Factory and the Old Dairy, visitors can learn about traditional skyr-making at the Efstidalur farm, as the siblings who own it offer guided tours of the dairy where one may observe skyr in the making. The same holds true for the Erpsstaðir Creamery in the west of Iceland, where Þorgrímur and Helga began with a similar

concept in 2009. In 2017, Erpsstaðir also became an ÉCONOMUSÉE®, joining a network of artisans and crafts enterprises in Canada and Northern Europe. The network is designed to help the participating fine crafts and agri-food enterprises develop their businesses and become more competitive as they "reach out to the general public, explain the local culture and contribute significantly to the preservation of an intangible cultural heritage."[16] All ÉCONOMUSÉE®ums include on their premises a workshop "where visitors can see the artisans at work and exchange with them," an interpretation space on traditional and contemporary know-how, a document center, and a boutique.[17] As Þorgrímur explained, as part of becoming an ÉCONOMUSÉE®um, Erpsstaðir inaugurated a skyr lounge to interpret skyr for visitors:

> We wound up with this skyr lounge where people can come and learn about skyr. We have some text on the walls. We have sketches, and we have 3D [*sic*] sculptures in addition to skyr tasting and a guided skyr tour— that's what we call it—where we recount the history of skyr, explain how it has been made through time, and I also philosophize on my theory of the origins of skyr. People who come here are fascinated to discover, really, how we managed to conserve the skimmed milk here in Iceland. Once the cream was removed and kneaded into butter for the rich folk, we could use the protein, eat it, and have the whey to preserve our food that we didn't want to spoil during winter. (interview, March 6, 2018)

The creamery has been very successful. It was well received when it opened in 2009, with approximately 5,000 visitors in the first year, a number that more than tripled in 5 years to some 17,000 in 2014 and stood at roughly 30,000 in 2018. Sales in skyr and ice cream have multiplied by the same factors. Þorgrímur spoke especially of four categories of customers who appreciate his traditional skyr in our interview: the foreigners, the "protein dudes," the dieters, and the seniors.

> Senior citizens are young again when they get their good old skyr. The protein dudes come and buy a few buckets of skyr and colostrum. Then it's all those who are dieting. They like to buy skyr and here you have clean skyr without flavorings. Thanks to its consistency, it is excellent for smoothies. (interview, March 6, 2018)

When asked further about the rejuvenation of seniors, Þorgrímur explained that what they like most about his skyr is the sour taste. "There is no sugar in it, so you really feel the acidity. When I get a group of senior citizens, I just go and get a pitcher of whey and put it out. I usually need to fetch two to three pitchers. It keeps them going until they come back again" (interview, March 6, 2018).

To refer once again to the work of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the "capacity of food to hold time, place, and memory is valued all the more in an era of hypermobility, when it can seem like everything is available everywhere all the time" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004:xiii). Food experiences form "edible chronotopes" that transport people through space and time (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004:xiii) through a convergence of senses, emotions, and memories. As a matter of neurological fact, the insular cortex of the brain, also known as the gustatory cortex, and the olfactory bulb are closely connected

to the amygdala, which is involved in emotional learning, and the hippocampus, which is central to memory. According to neuroscientists, the many connections between these areas of the brain link smell and taste closely to emotion and memory (Miranda 2012; Shepherd 2006; Soudry et al. 2011). Much like the smell and taste of a madeleine pastry for Marcel Proust, the taste of traditional skyr sends older people back to their youth when its acidity prickled their taste buds on a daily basis. It evokes memories, and it stirs emotions; they feel young again, an emotion socially practiced and shared when tasting skyr at Erpsstaðir.

Stirring Emotions

European ethnologist Monique Scheer developed the concept of "emotional practices" to describe how emotion-as-practice involves "the self (as body and mind), language, material artifacts, the environment, and other people" (Scheer 2012:193). This definition of emotional practices accentuates that emotions are embodied within a social context through bodily acts of experience and expression (Scheer 2012, 2016). If emotional practices are about doing emotions in everyday situations, then to taste traditional skyr is to do emotion in a way that brings a sour past to an artificially sweetened present.[18]

In their introduction to an edited volume titled *Edible Identities*, Ronda L. Brulotte and Michael A. Di Giovine remark on the affective powers of food: "Its taste on our individual tongues often incites strong emotions, while the communal, commensal experience of such sensations binds people together, not only through space but time as well, as individuals collectively remember past experiences with certain meals and imagine their ancestors having similar experiences. When this occurs, food is transformed into heritage" (Brulotte and Di Giovine 2016:1). This transubstantiation further complicates the emotions involved in eating heritage foods, pointing beyond the autobiographical to the collective and historical.

The concept of the heritage emotions (*les émotions patrimoniales*) is derived from the work of an interdisciplinary group of researchers in France, led by ethnologist Daniel Fabre, to study popular mobilizations around threatened heritage sites (Fabre 2013; Hottin 2011). As the French cultural sociologist Nathalie Heinich convincingly argues, the relationship to cultural heritage is charged with emotion. "One might even say that emotion is the proof of heritage; if the proof of the pudding, as the saying goes, is in the eating, the proof of heritage would be that it moves us" (Heinich 2012:21; authors' translation). Emotions, she maintains, reveal shared values. Sharing emotions is, therefore, a way of transforming them into socially recognizable values or norms. Heritage emotions can be positively charged—as in appreciation, admiration, curiosity, attachment, and pride—or negatively charged, as in shock, anger, horror, and indignation. Either way, according to Heinich, heritage emotions relate to the value of authenticity as a connection between the present state of the object of heritage and its origins, the value of presence as a feeling of encounter or proximity to persons through the object of heritage, and aesthetic value as the beauty of the object of heritage or, indeed, of its taste. These emotions are amplified, according to

Heinich, by an experience of antiquity, the presence of the past, or a relationship to ancestors, as well as by a sense of scarcity (2012:26; 2009).

The theaters of authenticity on the dairy farms of Erpsstaðir and Efstidalur stage these values in encounters with artisanal farmers who "presence" the past in making skyr with traditional methods and microbial cultures made scarce through innovations in industrial dairying, documenting their antiquity in spaces of interpretation and guided skyr tours, and offering a taste of heritage to appreciative visitors from the city and from abroad. The Skyr Factory in Hveragerði replaces the dairy farmers turned actors and interpreters (in Erpsstaðir and Efstidalur) with an actor turned master skyr maker, and the new Old Dairy under construction in Selfoss goes further still in interpreting skyr heritage in an exhibition and digital installation by Snorri Freyr Hilmarsson. Snorri is a renowned theatrical set designer and film production designer, working together with the creative artists, designers, animators, programmers, producers, and film and sound specialists of Gagarín, a richly awarded multimedia company that creates "highly interactive media solutions that allow people to experience stories vividly."[19] In its own manner, each production plays on heritage emotions, designing direct experiences of the heritage values of skyr: authenticity, presence, and the aesthetics of taste. As we shall see, these forms of emotional practice carry over into the marketing of mass-produced skyr.

Adding Value

Naturally, foreign visitors to Erpsstaðir have no childhood recollections of skyr. To be sure, the sour taste of old-fashioned skyr doesn't conjure up memories and stir emotions in the same way, but nevertheless, these visitors usually have a comparison on the basis of which to judge the taste of country skyr, something that Þorgrímur himself notes:

> Like the people who came today. They already knew we make old-fashioned skyr. They came here to taste it, and they had tasted the usual store-bought skyr. They said it isn't the same product. . . . No question about it. People also like tasting the whey, Icelanders and foreigners alike. (interview, March 6, 2018)

For these visitors, too, the tasting provides evidence of the transubstantiation of food into heritage and a way for them to participate directly in that heritage. As folklorist Lucy Long notes in her writings on culinary tourism, "participation occurs specifically because of the perceived otherness of the foodways," which is corroborated through the techniques of exhibition and interpretation in these skyr destinations, "and that otherness elicits curiosity." Culinary tourism, because it relies on "the senses of taste, smell, touch, and vision, offers a deeper, more integrated level of experience" than any sightseeing, and Long argues that it engages "one's physical being, not simply as an observer, but as a participant as well" (Long 2004:21).

A sense of scarcity no doubt amplifies the heritage emotions of tourists who taste Þorgrímur's skyr at Erpsstaðir. They have a curiosity for and appreciation of old-fashioned country skyr, or real skyr, a term that condenses the value of authenticity

and the aesthetics of taste. The following review is from the *Reykjavík Grapevine*, an English-language magazine for foreigners in Iceland.

> You have not tried real skyr until you have had it from a real small-batch producer like Erpsstaðir. The bacteria culture is different, the acidity is both milder and more pronounced, and the texture is between yogurt and cottage cheese (betraying its designation as a cheese, not a yogurt). Don't miss out on the real skyr experience. (Egilsson 2015)

Indeed, in Erpsstaðir as in Efstidalur, places that produce both skyr and its historical, cultural, and agricultural context, the visitor experiences the entire food supply chain from udder to ice cream, from grazing to dining, from milk to skyr, from live cultures to cultural heritage all at once. Who would have thought 30 years ago that skyr, the most quotidian of foods, would become a vector for heritage emotions? Who would have believed that milking might become a meaningful form of entertainment for people eager to observe it on a weekend outing or summer vacation?

Traditional skyr provides a textbook example of heritage as a value-added industry that works in tandem with tourism. In her theorization of cultural heritage, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett maintains that heritage adds the "value of pastness, exhibition, difference and, where possible, indigeneity" to its object. Places, goods, and practices that have lost their value, their former function or economic viability—"the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct"—undergo a transvaluation that grants them a second life as heritage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:149–50). As such, they evoke, with more or less success, heritage emotions.

In and of itself, to make skyr is to add value to skimmed milk, a low-value by-product of butter-making. Skyr-making turned this by-product into a comestible and conservable source of protein while producing a preservation medium for meat in the sour whey that remained when the skyr had been strained. The Erpsstaðir Creamery is one of three producers featured in the Slow Food presidium, the objective of which is to support the producers, adding value to their product with the Slow Food label. The label is a stamp of authenticity that references tradition. It helps to distinguish traditional skyr from competing products like mass-produced, pasteurized skyr from MS Iceland Dairies, while encouraging consumers to use their purchasing power to preserve traditional skyr. Indeed, above all else, Slow Food emphasizes the distinction of traditional skyr from its industrial counterpart, locating the mark of tradition in the transfer of microbial cultures from older to newer batches. Erpsstaðir's designation as an ÉCONOMUSÉE®um further helps to coagulate the values of difference, pastness, and indigeneity as part of its skyr, developing the techniques of exhibition still more in spaces of interpretation and guided tours. If skyr is a value-added by-product of butter and ice cream, then through the work of distinction, tradition emerges as a by-product of industrialization. Heritage adds value to this by-product by transvaluing its obsolescence as authenticity, playing on the heritage emotions of consumers.

It is worth noting how skyr, once a highly localized, heterogeneous foodstuff with diverse microbial cultures and important variations in manufacturing methods from region to region and from one farm to the next, moved gradually through the twentieth

century toward full standardization in the MS Dairies' monopoly, only to enter a new phase of localization and diversification in the twenty-first century. At Erpsstaðir, dairy farmer and scientist Þorgrímur started his own skyr using live cultures from mass-produced skyr (Óhrært skyr brand). That is to say that live cultures harvested from mass-produced skyr create a new cultural (in a double sense) context. Diversification emerges through this lens as a by-product of standardization.

Added value comes from the skyr narratives that this newfound diversity and tradition enable and legitimate. MS Iceland Dairies has tuned into these stories and adopted them as its own. Indeed, the export of skyr relies on the added value of these narratives. The export of skyr, the latest phase in its long history, is a subject for another article we are currently co-writing, "Skyr Wars: Cultures and Authenticity from the Screen to the Court," but skyr's branding as heritage is also for domestic consumption.

Heritage Branding

MS Iceland Dairies promoted a new brand of skyr in 2017 under the name Ísey skyr. The company's advertisements introduce Ísey as a beautiful Icelandic female name, but the name refers both to ice (*ís*) and to island (*ey*), referencing Iceland itself in the guise of a woman. Under the heading of "Our Story," one can read on their website about the historical and cultural role of skyr through the centuries.[20] What is noteworthy about this skyr narrative is its similarity to the one recounted by Slow Food. MS Iceland Dairies, by its own account, builds on this historical legacy. And it is true that there is no denying the lineage. Historically, however, it is also clear that the creation of the dairy farmers' cooperatives in the twentieth century and the ensuing industrialization of the production spelled the end of the very tradition that MS Iceland Dairies claims as its own: the end of traditional skyr-making on individual farms; the end of traditional variation in methods, taste, and texture; the end of microbial diversity and continuity; and the end of skyr's traditional function in the Icelandic diet, the traditional manner of serving it, and its traditional role as a medium of preservation. With reference to the discourse of heritage, MS Iceland Dairies thus markets skyr by claiming the very traditions that it moved beyond, left behind, retired, and replaced.

In its marketing in the United Kingdom, Ísey skyr is a "new dairy from a timeless tradition."[21] In the same vein, MS Iceland Dairies' US trading partner, called Icelandic Provisions, markets skyr to Americans by referencing the "long history" of skyr-making, claiming that "its deeply rooted Icelandic tradition is believed to have remained unchanged from first settlement until the middle of the last century." In case their niche audience isn't paying attention, they persist. "Using the same recipes and cultures that have endured through the centuries, nourishing Icelanders since the days of the Vikings, Icelandic Provisions brings traditional Icelandic Skyr to the United States."[22]

Why this sudden emphasis on history, tradition, and heritage? According to Björn Sigurður Gunnarsson, Ísey Skyr is the domestic rebranding of Skyr.is—the "new generation" of skyr from 2001— without any notable changes to the product itself. Skyr.is arrived on the scene at the time of the dot.com bubble at the turn of the millennium, but by 2017, its branding was obsolete. A new marketing strategy was

needed. Gunnarsson explained that referencing tradition and heritage related much better to the zeitgeist (interview, February 18, 2019), a term that we might substitute, following Raymond Williams, with "structures of feeling," by which he refers to "affective elements of consciousness and relationships" (1977:128–35). What matters most, Gunnarsson said, is the quality of the product, but he added that the cultural context and history help to frame skyr in terms of authenticity (interview, February 18, 2019). The quality of skyr refers to its taste and creamy texture and that it's naturally fat-free and high in protein content. It is this combination of health and heritage that establishes continuity between the past and the present and makes skyr an "authentic superfood."

If, with Nathalie Heinich, we see the value of authenticity as a correlate of heritage emotions, we may deduce that, in framing skyr in terms of its authenticity, MS Iceland Dairies is playing to these emotions: to brand skyr as heritage is an attempt to tap into the structures of feeling, the zeitgeist. In this way, the company takes its cue from the staging at Erpsstaðir and Efstidalur, reproducing, by different means and insofar as possible, the heritage values of authenticity and presence in the mass marketing of industrially produced skyr as a way of adding value to the product.

Indeed, we observed a dialectic of scale over the past 2 decades, where the mergers of dairy cooperatives and the standardization of industrial skyr created a niche in the market that Þorgrímur and Helga at the Erpsstaðir creamery, and later the siblings at the dairy farm in Efstidalur, found a way to fill. While MS Iceland Dairies branded its mass-produced skyr with the country domain .is, Slow Food promoted traditional skyr and skyr-making farmers in response to the threat posed by standardization. In the tourism boom, skyr offers visitors a way to ingest local culture, and local skyr destinations multiply. The latest additions are the Ísey Skyr Bars that opened in three gas stations in Reykjavík in 2019, with more to come. As part of its rebranding of skyr.is in 2017, MS Iceland Dairies—the industrial dairy monopoly—adopted the Slow Food narrative of skyr's history and the unbroken tradition of skyr-making throughout the centuries, placing itself as the legitimate heir to this legacy.

To adopt a distinction from Virginie Amilien and Gunnar Vittersø, if we characterize skyr from Erpsstaðir and Efstidalur as *local* food (i.e., short-traveled and with a close relationship between producers and consumers), then we might contrast it with Ísey skyr as a *localized* food product that is further from its origin and with more distance between producer and consumer, but with locality, "'culture' and 'tradition' as added values" (Vittersø and Amilien 2011). The two don't clash, and they don't compete for the same market share. Instead, they complement one another. Thus, the small entrepreneurs in Erpsstaðir, Efstidalur, Hveragerði, and elsewhere pose no particular threat for MS Iceland Dairies. On the contrary, their existence helps validate brand storytelling, which is designed to distinguish Ísey skyr from its foreign competitors on dairy shelves abroad (cf. Yotova 2018:49).

To quote Gunnarsson, the product developer at MS Iceland Dairies, once more:

> Skyr is a novelty that many have jumped on, as happened also with Greek yogurt. . . . We just have to accept that. Under those circumstances, it may be better to brand ourselves in a particular way. That's what has happened with Ísey Skyr, which also

> refers to its origins. We launched it in 2017, and we think it's off to a good start. It distinguishes us, but it takes some time to build a brand in a way that everyone realizes that it is the real deal. (interview, February 18, 2019)

"Heritage branding" (Yotova 2018), in other words, offers a competitive advantage. It also adds value to a product with a relatively high price tag compared to other products on the same dairy shelf (Lien 2003:165).[23] Sales suggest that this is a successful branding strategy.

Conclusions—Four Theses on Skyr

Summing up, we propose the following theses to account for contemporary skyr-making and marketing.

(1) Skimmed milk is a by-product of butter making.

Butter was a highly valued product in the pastoral economy of the past centuries. Butter could pay rent. It could pay wages, and it was used as currency in exchange for other goods. Once the cream for the butter was skimmed off the top of the milk, however, that left 9 liters of skimmed milk for every gallon of cream as a low-value by-product of butter. To make skyr was to add value to this by-product, preserve it, and make a protein-rich staple from it. In a parallel fashion, in a post-industrial agricultural economy that relies on tourism, the home production of ice cream in Erpsstaðir and Efstidalur leaves skimmed milk, out of which farmers create old-fashioned country skyr for added value.

Much as skyr is a value-added by-product of butter and ice cream, we argue that, thanks to the work of distinction that Slow Food has pioneered,

(2) Tradition is a by-product of industrialization.

By transvaluing as markers of authenticity those dairying techniques rendered obsolete by industrialization, cultural heritage adds value to this by-product. As we have seen, the dairy farmer and scientist at Erpsstaðir used live cultures from mass-produced skyr as a starter for his homemade skyr. Cultures harvested from mass produced skyr thus helped to create a new cultural context.

In other words,

(3) Diversification is a by-product of standardization.

Finally, as part of its branding for international markets, as well as the domestic one, storytelling about skyr's history in Iceland highlights its local identity, staged not only on a handful of farms but also in the House of Skyr in Selfoss, a recreated historical building with a multimedia exhibition catering to all the senses, designed to domicile skyr in Iceland as part of its international marketing.

That is to say that, for skyr,

(4) Local identity is a by-product of export.

All told, if skyr-making adds value to skimmed milk, then it holds equally true that heritagization adds value to skyr. The transformation of skyr from a modest staple to heritage stardom demonstrates how emotion adds value to contemporary food branding. Key to this transformation is the sharing of "heritage emotions," which brings people together in different social contexts such as at dairy farms and in the House of Skyr, and through marketing and advertising. The story of skyr in the twenty-first century demonstrates that this everyday staple would not have come to life as heritage without being infused with emotions. Only a pinch of old skyr is needed to produce a new batch of heritage emotions that relate to values of authenticity, connecting producers and consumers, the past and the present, and products and places. To taste skyr is to do emotion in a way that moves people across time and space.

The empirical analysis that we sketch in this essay sheds light on the ways in which local and global practices are mutually shaped through a discourse of heritage. The heritagization of skyr aligns the dairy product with international trends and markets while at the same time re-orienting people's thoughts and actions on a domestic level. This re-orientation places skyr in a new cultural context that changes how Icelanders relate to their own food culture, creating a double vision of sorts, in which skyr is discursively reframed as cultural heritage—authentic and extraordinary—while simultaneously remaining the most ordinary and unremarkable of breakfast staples. This heritagization stages the production and consumption of Icelandic skyr as heritage even as its general consumption remains offstage on the kitchen table. The performance of locality, history, and cultural context on the heritage stage facilitates skyr's heritage branding, which helps to move it through global spaces of consumption.

Postscript

As we prepared this article for publication, following peer-review and revisions, we stumbled across a class action lawsuit against Icelandic Provisions, a major producer of skyr in the United States, co-owned by MS Iceland Dairies. The charges: misleading consumers about the place of origin as well as exploiting their desire for authenticity and their wish to maintain local traditions and cultures. Specifically, in the complaint, the plaintiffs allege:

1. Icelandic Provisions, Inc. ("defendant") markets, manufactures, labels, distributes, promotes and sells the traditional Icelandic dairy product—"skyr"—under the Icelandic Provisions brand ("Product").
2. Defendant's marketing and advertising of the Product gives consumers the impression it is made in Iceland, including its front label representations of "Traditional Icelandic Skyr," "Icelandic Provisions" and the image of the Icelandic countryside with a snow-covered backdrop.

3. However, the Product is not made in Iceland but in upstate New York.
4. In marketing and advertising its Product to give the impression it is made in Iceland, Defendant understands that today's consumers are faced with a dizzying area [*sic*] of products and choices.
5. For many consumers, "authenticity has overtaken quality as the prevailing purchasing criterion."
6. Consumers are willing to pay a price premium "for what they perceive to be authentic products, particularly those perceived to be authentically associated with a specific place," often where the product originated.
7. Examples of these products include Scotch whisky from Scotland, maple syrup from Vermont, tomatoes from Italy, chocolate from Switzerland and skyr from Iceland.
8. The reasons include (1) an expectation that a product made in the location where it was first developed will be higher quality than elsewhere and (2) a desire to support and maintain local traditions and cultures at the expense of large-scale production by international conglomerates.

. . .

41. Had plaintiffs and class members known the truth, they would not have bought the Product or would have paid less for it.
42. The Product is sold for a price premium compared to other similar products, no less than $1.99 for 5.3 oz. cup, higher than it would otherwise be sold for absent the misleading representations.

. . .

72. Plaintiffs and class members desired to purchase skyr that was made in Iceland and believed they were doing and relied on Defendant's representations, omissions, and half-truths.

(*Mantini et al. v. Icelandic Provisions, Inc.*, Case No. 7:21-cv-00618, U.S. District Court Southern District of New York, filed January 23, 2021)

The lawsuit alleges, in other words, that the heritage branding of skyr is a complete success.

Incidentally, the same law firm (Sheehan & Associates, P.C., Great Neck, NY) behind the complaint against Icelandic Provisions (from January 23, 2021) filed a nearly identical class action complaint against Heineken USA 2 months earlier for marketing "Original Tecata Cerveza" that is imported from the Netherlands, not from Mexico as the branding suggests, complaining that "today's consumers are faced with increasing commercialization of products and seek brands that are genuine—Mexican beer from Mexico, Italian tomatoes from Italy, etc." (*Schelmetty et al. v. Heineken USA, Inc.*, Case No. 7:20-cv-09985, U.S. District Court Southern District of New York, filed November 27, 2020). It seems that Sheehan & Associates, too, have found a niche with interesting prospects in the field of cultural authenticity and heritage branding.

The marketing, branding, and sales of skyr by Icelandic Provisions, MS Iceland Dairies, and various other skyr producers on the global dairy markets compete and clash in "Skyr Wars," sometimes hot, sometimes cold, sometimes symbolic, fought out on the screen or the page, at other times legal, fought out in the courtroom, but always commercial, claiming tradition and authenticity in various overlapping and often conflicting ways. The Skyr Wars are the subject for the third and last part of our skyr trilogy: "Skyr Wars: Cultures and Authenticity from the Screen to the

Court." In the meantime, the second one analyzes the history of skyr through the dual lens of gender and bacteria: "Mother Cultures: Skyr Microbes, Dairy Maids and Super Women."

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Notes

1. Iceland Provisions, What Is Skyr?, https://www.icelandicprovisions.com/what-is-skyr/ (accessed October 17, 2019).

2. All interviews were conducted in Icelandic, and they were recorded and transcribed verbatim. All quotes are translated by the authors. Informed consent was obtained from the informants orally, and they gave their permission to be quoted by name.

3. However, for full disclosure, the mother of one of the authors (Valdimar) did make skyr at home while living abroad in Sweden in the 1960s since skyr was not available there, and she believed it was necessary for raising healthy children. She made it in a big bucket from skimmed milk that she heated and cooled down again before adding a spoonful of skyr, originally imported by a visiting relative for this purpose, and rennet. After the curds had time to coagulate, she strained it through a muslin cloth. In the end, in her words, "very little came of very much."

4. Auðhumla, Saga Auðhumlu, http://www.audhumla.is/Um-Audhumlu/Saga-Audhumlu/Saga-Audhumlu-meira/ (accessed January 25, 2020). See also Mjólkursamsalan, Fyrirtækið, https://www.ms.is/um-ms/uppruninn/fyrirtaekid (accessed January 15, 2020).

5. Slow Food, Ark of Taste, https://www.fondazioneslowfood.com/en/what-we-do/the-ark-of-taste/ (accessed January 26, 2020).

6. Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, Traditional Icelandic Skyr, https://www.fondazioneslowfood.com/en/slow-food-presidia/50588/ (accessed December 19, 2019).

7. Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, Traditional Icelandic Skyr, https://www.fondazioneslowfood.com/en/slow-food-presidia/50588/ (accessed December 19, 2019).

8. https://www.fondazioneslowfood.com/en/slow-food-presidia/50588/ (accessed June 4, 2021).

9. Erpsstaðir, https://www.facebook.com/rjomabuid/ (accessed January 25, 2020).

10. The four brands produced by MS Iceland Dairies are Ísey skyr, KEA skyr, SMS smáskyr, and Óhrært skyr.

11. Visit Selfoss, https://visitselfoss.com/ (accessed January 12, 2020).

12. Miðbær Selfoss, https://web.archive.org/web/20190429175023/http://midbaerselfoss.is/husin/mjolkurbuid/ (accessed April 29, 2019).

13. While this article was under review, *Western Folklore* came out with a fascinating special issue on *Culinary Nationalism*, edited by Lucy M. Long, exploring intersections of food with national identity, electoral politics, and race. While it could be interesting to consider skyr from the perspective of "culinary nationalism," a term coined "to refer to pride in the distinctiveness and quality of one's cuisine being transferred to pride in the nation itself" (Long 2021:6), we suggest here that if skyr has acquired symbolic significance as a national heritage food, the making of its local/national identity is not so much a political project as a carefully considered and deliberate marketing strategy to add value and competitiveness to a product in domestic and international markets through national branding: capitalism before nationalism.

14. Sveitir.is., Efstidalur: Food and Farming, http://www.sveitir.is/upplysingar/matarklasinn/efstidalur/ (accessed January 26, 2020).

15. Sveitir.is., Efstidalur: Food and Farming, http://www.sveitir.is/upplysingar/matarklasinn/efstidalur/ (accessed January 26, 2020).

16. ÉCONOMUSÉE, http://economusees.com/en/ (accessed November 21, 2019).

17. ÉCONOMUSÉE, http://economusees.com/en/ (accessed November 21, 2019).

18. To similar, or at least overlapping, ends, Margaret Wetherell (2012) has proposed the concept of "affective practice." In a paper that Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell co-authored with Wetherell (Wetherell, Smith, and Campbell 2018:10), the notion of "affective heritage practice" for connecting a practice-oriented understanding of affect and emotion to heritage is examined. The authors note that a "consideration of heritage as an affective practice requires an analysis of what particular affects and emotions *do*, not only in defining the heritage meanings constructed by practice, but also what their consequences are for contemporary aspirations and needs." Emotion must be understood as a process that frames heritage and its value, something that can be explored through everyday practices such as eating. See also Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, Emma Waterton, and Steve Watson on "the theoretical potentialities of affect and emotion in the experience of heritage" (2017:5).

19. Gagarín, http://gagarin.is/about/ (accessed October 18, 2019).

20. Ísey skyr, Our Story, https://www.iseyskyr.co.uk/our-story (accessed October 17, 2019).

21. Ísey skyr, https://www.iseyskyr.co.uk/our-story (accessed October 17, 2019).

22. Iceland Provisions, About Us, https://www.icelandicprovisions.com/about-us/ (accessed October 17, 2019).

23. Consider, for example, the yogurt with which skyr is usually compared, even if it is technically a curd cheese. Using the latest manufacturing technologies, it still takes between three-and-a-half and four times as much milk to produce the same volume of skyr as compared to yogurt. The sour whey that is strained from the skyr does not have much market value at the time of writing, though a great deal of value-adding experimentation is underway.

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