

Shadow of Soy

In August of 2016, I toured Ruene farm in Skiptvet with Stian Haltuff. I met Stian's family, his cows, his little dog, and the oats, barley, pea grain, and rapeseed in the fields. The tour ended at Stian's grain mill.

*O beautiful for spacious skies
for amber waves of grain*

One by one, Stian listed the grains that were ground together to make the nutritious food that the cows need to produce their best milk. One by one, he pointed to the fields where he grew those grains. And finally...the last nugget...the soy.

"Is soy grown in Norway?" I asked

"No, but we must include soy for the nutritional content. Since it is not grown here it is imported from Brazil," he answered.

for amber waves of grain



Stian's grain field in Skiptvet

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I was born in Coldwater, Ohio, in the Midwest of the United States, the land of corn and soy. In 1830 when my ancestors emigrated from Northern Europe, the region was covered by vast hardwood forests, as dense and full of life as the Amazonian rain forests.

*A thoroughfare for freedom beat
Across the wilderness!*

Within a generation those forests, home to indigenous communities for millennia, were clear-cut. In their place stand mile after unchanging mile of corn and soy. This massive re-shaping of the biosphere at the advent of the industrial age was part of the shift to our new geological era, the anthropocene. Manifest destiny.

*May God thy gold refine,
Till all success be nobleness,
And every gain divine!*



Soy field in Ohio

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En route to Norway, soy crosses the Atlantic from the mouth of the Amazon to the port of Moss. This journey is made possible by pirates with names like Monsanto, Denofa, Amaggi and Cargill. Carrrrrrghill. Their privateers, small farmers promised a high price for their green gold, slashed and burned nearly 3000 square kilometers of rain forest just last year. These actions are illegal, violating international treaties and national agreements with indigenous communities.

*O barco, meu coração não aguenta
O vaca, meu coração não aguenta*

Oh ship, my heart cannot handle it.
Oh cow, my heart cannot handle it.

As a result, the Amazonian rain forests absorb one third less carbon than they did a decade ago. This practice contributes to global warming and sea level rise, propelling us deeper into the anthropocene.

*Navegar é preciso
Viver não é preciso*



Amazon burning (photo U Mass Amherst)

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To navigate is necessary,
to live is not necessary.

A Roman general uttered this phrase to his seamen as they navigated through a storm in service of war. With soy, too, navigation supercedes life. Soy has circumnavigated the globe, from China where it was first domesticated, to the Americas where it dominates the agricultural landscape, to Europe and back to China where it feeds the cows, pigs and chickens that in turn feed us. But all of this complex navigating decreases the life of the one that sustains us—the *pachamama*.

Back to Skiptvet, where this story began. Stian and his cohort of farmers have developed a new feed mix with rapeseed hulls, which frees them from using Brazilian soy. His cows produce their best milk, nourished by grains rooted to the soil of Skiptvet, not to global trade.

*Viver é preciso
Navegar não é viver*

Life is necessary
Navigating is not life



Loading soy onto cargo ship in Brazil (Photo Merco Press)