Welcome to West Asia! By the year 2115 if you read the word ‘Europe’ you knew you were reading an historical document. It was only a few decades ago that the Geography textbooks began to call the region by its proper name. Like the Holy Roman Empire before it, and many a Grand Duchy, United Kingdom and Monetary Union, no demarcation of space lasts forever. Seas and rivers keep their names for longer, or at least until some megalomaniac decides they wish to stake a particular claim, but ever since most of the more easily reached oil was extracted from the seabed such behaviour has abated.

Today, in 2115, West Asia is warm. Not as warm as much of the rest of the world, but certainly tepid. The Atlantic, Baltic and Mediterranean all help cool the lands nearest them.
It is as soon as you head any distance inland that the temperatures rise rapidly, at least in the long summer months. In the winter precipitation is much greater than it used to be and people now talk of the rainy season. So much is determined by climate and the predictability of weather. A great deal that we took for granted turned out to be quite sensitive to global warming. We knew the snow would melt from the Alps. We didn’t know that just a little extra rain would be all it took to create such widespread and repeated flooding. The river basins of West Asia had taken millennia to form and could not adapt quickly to so much more rainfall.

It is hard today to imagine the Eurocentric thinking of our recent ancestors. They drew world maps with what we now know as West Asia at the centre. They even put the zero line of longitude through where Greenwich island now lies in the Thames Delta. There is still a little plaque preserved as a warning of folly reading: ‘height above sea level 154.7 feet’. It is odd now that they thought they could measure sea level, something that changes, so precisely. But in the past Europeans thought they knew it all.

World history had been written from a European viewpoint until very recently. All great thinking had been ascribed to Europe where all invention had supposedly been made. Apparently Europe even had a period it called ‘Enlightenment’! Europe said it established free trade, its people made out they had done everything first, although they had to extend the borders of that chunk of West Asia they called Europe almost to Africa to allow them to make such a claim.

In 2015 Europe had the greatest concentration of ‘top’ universities in the world. It is hard to believe that this was just a century ago. But so much has changed in such a short time. In retrospect it might have been unfair to have blamed so much of the catastrophe of greed on Europe and its North American and Australasian off-shoots; but then - they did not do much to help themselves avoid being blamed. And because of that it is no wonder almost no one claims to be European anymore, given all those mistakes, of the era that is now labelled ‘European’. 
The decline of Europe began at least two centuries ago. In terms of population, Europe began to most obviously shrink in the 1930s when many governments lamented how few children were being born. They had a huge number of governments back then. That shrinking was masked by the migration of adults into Europe from its colonies and former colonies in North Africa, the Caribbean, India and the East Indies. Those young adults, born outside Europe in the 1930s had their own children in Europe in the 1960s, 70s and 80s; but even they were not enough.

In the 1990s and early 2000s Europe attracted yet more young people from even further-a-field. It needed to do this to maintain its population and the balance of that population. It had been many decades since any of the very many countries in Europe had seen an average family size of even two children per couple and yet the Europeans were arrogant enough to make out that they resented the influx of peoples who would replace their numbers, improve their genetic mix, rebuild their roads and houses, staff their businesses, and care for them in old age. Thousands from Africa drowned each year in the Mediterranean trying to reach what was then a continent running out of younger people. Europe was supposedly wealthy but with national government debts per person that dwarfed any debts those from Africa were fleeing. But that was before the catastrophe. People thought differently then.

It is all too easy in hindsight to see the change that was coming. It was almost impossible for the Europeans of 2015 to imagine it. They had been told for centuries that they were superior, that they were the richest people on the planet, and that everyone who was anyone wanted to be like them. They supposedly had the most sophisticated music, invented all the sports worth playing, had written most books worth reading. They were even told that their antiquated religion was superior and more civilised than others, that their wealth - such as it was - had been fairly earned through their own labours and not largely appropriated from elsewhere through guile, slavery and at the barrel of a gun.
In 2015 most Europeans had no idea that the national debts their countries had amassed were real debts. Their leaders told them that this was just ‘electronic money' and not to worry about how global finance worked. Even the anarchists helped propagate the myth that debts were not real. However, debt is only not real when you are more powerful than your lender or when the amount owed is too great to ever be repaid. The debt turned out to be huge but not too great to avoid repaying. China and other poorer countries bought up the debt. This group from ‘the rest of the world’ wanted repaying if it they were going to continue to ship the goods that Europe needed to sustain itself, and it was the rest of the world which had the resources. Europe had depleted itself first.

Valiant attempts were made to put off the inevitable as long as possible. A coal and steel community was started in 1951. First this was of half a dozen countries that were having trouble mining coal and selling steel. Later that community of countries would pass through several reincarnations and spread to eventually include every country on the artificial continent. In 1999 they formed a monetary union as a subset of a wider European Union in one of these many reincarnations. Almost immediately controlling debt became that Union’s reason to exist. Debtor nations such as Greece were pariahs, but those who relied on them paying their debts were labelled frugal, rather than speculators.

Outside, as well as inside the monetary union, debt was increasingly privatised. In the UK almost half of all children were coerced into becoming lifelong debtors at the age of 17 when they had to apply for the apparent ‘privilege' of attending university. They were told they would never have to pay it off if they did not earn enough. They were not told that their generation would have to collectively pay the debt off if enough of them did not individually over-repay it to cover their non-paying friends’ debt. These children were the first of those who came to be called the ‘indentured generation’. Today all but a handful of that generation are dead and so we have no first-hand accounts. Today very few people live to reach over 115 years of age. Back then they still believed life expectancy would keep on rising. It didn’t; debt did. And so the law was changed to allow people to inherit their parents’ debts.
Whatever they tried, all the monies could not be repaid. Europeans were not doing things that people in the rest of the world valued highly enough to pay them so much that the income could cancel the debt. It turned out that wearing slick suits and giving PowerPoint presentations concerning ‘investment advice’ was not a service that the people of the rest of the globe had an endless desire to consume; especially when the advice repeatedly turned out to be poor. Tourism grew and that helped soften the blow when it eventually came. For a time it appeared that Higher Education was expanding due to a rise in overseas students, but that also turned out to largely be a fickle form of tourism. Around the planet people discovered that there were places just as interesting as those found in Europe. And so a place that was beginning to be called Western Asia was put it in its rightful place.

As Europe slowly turned into Western Asia it did adapt. A citizen’s income was enacted across the monetary union. Very low at first and mainly symbolic, it was quickly raised to allow all those countries’ separate tax and benefit systems to be withdrawn. Western Asia simply couldn’t support so many separate bureaucracies. But it could afford a citizen’s income to ensure that no one starved, just as long as fewer and fewer people were permitted to become rich, especially very rich. All this is obvious now, but we need to try to think like they thought back then, in 2015, if we are to understand how little they knew – and why they could not see the change they called catastrophe - coming.