

Throw Away Your Maps—But Watch Out for Dinosaurs

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“The woman and the man dreamed that God was dreaming about them.” That’s the opening line of *Memory of Fire*, the first volume of Eduardo Galeano’s historical trilogy set in Latin America. In essence, it is an act of rewriting the world to breathe new life into the history and, by extension, the future of his continent.

I’ve been thinking about this conscious act of recreation ever since I was invited to write this column. Challenged to draw a line through the disparate collection of book reviews, travel stories, features, and opinion pieces I’ve written for this paper over the past three years, I suggested that the organizing principle was the relationship between stories and community—how we tell stories to define individual and group identity. The history of Canada, nay, the world, is being rewritten either to challenge or reinforce the old world order. That is the spirit of our age.

Yes, we live in times of startling change. And we know from the study of history that at such times the old order will bite back with all the accumulated power and vengeance at its disposal. This week, Nelson Mandela sounded a warning against those who would drag us into “regime change” and oil politics—“dinosaurs” such as Dick Cheney, who once steadfastly opposed Mr. Mandela’s release from prison. As the Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci famously opined, “The old is dead, the new is struggling to be born.”

It is the new, rather than the old, that concerns me—because a society that closes itself off from constant

renewal is a society that unwittingly commits suicide.

So what of this brave new world? Are we headed for a world without borders—where the most popular food in England is a curry unknown in Madras, where Brazilian-born soccer players turn out for Japan, where virtual activists escape Chinese government sanction by moving into cyberspace?

Or is the Jurassic Park of nation-states, a world created in the image of the European superpowers and their malcontents, going to prevail? Do we need to draw a new world map with new orders, new reference points, new institutions and time frames to accommodate it? How are we going to rewrite history to give backbone to the future?

These are the questions that animate me. I hope they interest you.

Scientific innovation has shrunk time and space. Nowhere and no one is an island any more. Never before in our history has humankind moved around so much. I have probably travelled more miles this year than the combined mileage managed by the previous five generations of my family.

Although Canada is now my home—or at least the start and end point of all my travelling—I am constantly on the move, engaged in the search for answers to ever more urgent questions about home, identity, and belonging.

In all this moving around (Canada is the third country I’ve lived in), I have become what is known as “a third-culture kid.” There are more and more of us out there. Some of us don’t even know that we are products of

more than one culture. And it is here in the new world, where cultures have been mingling and colliding for centuries, that an experiment is taking place, creating a new acknowledgment of a universal truth too many people want to conveniently ignore: We are all the sum of multicultures. As Walt Whitman wrote, “I contain multitudes.”

The map of the world as we know it cannot contain the multitudes within a just and sustainable system. New maps are required because the political, cultural, economic, religious, and even geographical maps of the world overlap and overlay the old order. And where there is overlap, there is tension, conflict.

This conflict is also the source of creativity; popular music now is virtually unrecognizable from the music-industry-approved mainstream acts of 20 years ago. Underground genres and independent labels have brought radical and alternative sounds from around the world.

Creative tension makes the world go round and only becomes a threat to world security when there is a collective failure of imagination.

And the only impediment to the free expression of imagination is the fear of change and the parochialism of people appalled by the ugly and beautiful complexity of the world in motion.

So my quest in this column is to peer at the world in motion through the lens of my multiple identities, and to reflect on what I see. To that end, I am like an Australian Aboriginal going walkabout, roaming without borders.