

## Southern Alienation

By Ingrid Piller | April 7, 2012 | Language & globalization

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Erosion caused by rabbits in a gully in South Australia

I've spent this morning decorating [Easter eggs](#) and making origami [Easter bunnies](#) with my child. Tomorrow I'm going to host an [Easter egg hunt](#) and in the past three weeks, I've attended a [chaharsanbe-suri fire](#), a [Norouz party](#) and a [13bedar](#) picnic. In short, I'm having a great time celebrating spring! 😊 The only problem is that it's not actually spring in the Southern Hemisphere. To the extent that the four seasons are a meaningful concept in Australia, it's early autumn.

Before you jump to the conclusion that it's just me and my migrant family who cling stubbornly to Old-World traditions that are meaningless in the new environment, bear in mind that mainstream Australia is similarly out of touch. Along with

Christmas, Easter is the main holiday season and [business in chocolate eggs and chocolate bunnies is booming](#).

Celebrating the Northern Spring in the Southern Autumn may be disconnected but one of the main symbols of the celebration is even more inappropriate: as is well known, rabbits are a serious introduced pest in Australia. Rabbits were released into the wild in Australia to make Australia look a bit more British: for hunting and possibly also as prey for foxes, who were introduced at around the same time. As one early settler, who wrote home to Britain for the delivery of a few rabbits wrote:

*"The introduction of a few rabbits could do little harm and might provide a touch of home, in addition to a spot of hunting."*

It's been an expensive nostalgia: [24 rabbits introduced in 1859 multiplied to many hundred millions by the 1920s](#). Today, the annual direct cost of crop damage from rabbits is estimated at 113 million dollars and comes on top of indirect costs in top soil erosion as well as flora and fauna biodiversity losses resulting directly from rabbits.

Because rabbits have been so disastrous in Australia, there has been a campaign to replace the Easter Bunny with the [Easter Bilby](#). However, the campaign hasn't been particularly successful: none of my local supermarkets carries chocolate Easter bilbies but all of them carry shelves and shelves of chocolate Easter bunnies.

In his book *Collapse*, [Jared Diamond](#) explores how societies choose to fail or survive. One characteristic he identifies of self-destructive societies is that they fail to adapt their cultural values to new environmental conditions. Australia is one of his case-studies of a contemporary First-World nation holding "disastrous cultural values:" values undermining a society's self-interest and long-term survival.

Celebrating spring in autumn and iconizing bunnies is good fun and may seem relatively innocent – in the same way that wanting Australia to look more like Britain and hankering after some fox and rabbit hunting was good fun and seemed relatively innocent a century-and-a-half ago...

As we enjoy this Easter holiday season in Australia, it also provides us with an opportunity to reflect on how out of touch we are as a society with the land we love.

PS: After discussing this post with my daughter, we agree that our origami Easter bunnies are actually Easter [bandicoots](#) and that we are waiting for the Easter bandicoot to hide our eggs tomorrow!

