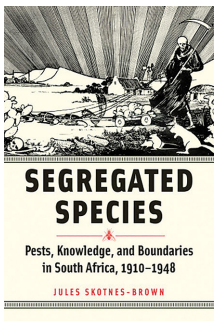
BOOK TITLE:
Segregated Species: Pests, Knowledge, and Boundaries in South Africa, 1910–1948



AUTHOR:
Jules Skotnes-Brown

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REVIEWER:
Anjuli Webster[1]

AFFILIATION:
[1]Department of Liberation Studies, University of Fort Hare, Alice, South Africa

EMAIL:
awebster@ufh.ac.za

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Segregated species, language and knowledge

Segregated Species is a history of animals, insects, disease, settler science, knowledge, boundary-making and segregation in early 20th century South Africa. Through five regionally specific case studies, Skotnes-Brown explores how and why some animals came to be protected by law in colonial South Africa, while others came to be reviled. The author frames his inquiry around three main analytical concepts: boundaries, pests and knowledge. He traces how various creatures, from elephants to gerbils and trypanosomes to locust birds, crossed physical boundaries between veld, farm and town, and conceptual boundaries between useful and harmful. In doing so, he offers an interspecies history of the making of segregationist South Africa.

The book is clearly written and based on extensive research in various archives, periodicals, newspaper articles and reports by scientists and government experts. Geographically, the first two chapters focus on discrete areas – the Addo Elephant Park of the Eastern Cape and colonial Zululand. The boundaries of Chapters 3 and 4 expand through the routes of birds and rodents, respectively – creatures that are difficult to contain through fencing or hunting. The final chapter narrows the geographical focus again – on the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park. Each substantive chapter is preceded by a partly fictional interlude drawing on historical evidence.

Skotnes-Brown uses the term "vernacular knowledge" to describe expertise among groups of people beyond the realm of the professional sciences (p. 17). According to the author, the making of settler colonial scientific expertise often depended on settler scientists, farmers and bureaucrats appropriating African knowledge, while simultaneously representing Africans as untrustworthy, unreliable and unscientific. Scientific debates about pest control were intimately related to debates about racial segregation – an argument he makes compellingly.

I have several concerns with the book, but will focus mainly on two here. My first concern relates to the author's claims regarding African knowledge while relying heavily on English-language sources. Skotnes-Brown states that he has written a history "without silencing African historical actors" by "scouring periodicals, newspapers, anthropological texts, and retrospective interviews" to find instances of "African expertise" (p. 242). I think that a caveat might have been made here that the scouring is almost exclusively in English-language sources.

Chapter 3, 'Birds and the Balance of Nature', demonstrates the issue most clearly. The majority of the chapter traces settler ideas and debates about the usefulness of wild birds, focusing on economic ornithology's attempts to integrate them into settler agrarian economies (p. 108). The main actor in the chapter is settler zoologist Frederick FitzSimons, who conceived of wild birds as "part of a natural system that sustained settler capitalism and white prosperity in rural areas" (p. 121). In a section titled 'Black Expertise, the Demonization of Black Farmers, and White Degeneration', Skotnes-Brown claims to paint a picture of "indigenous African ideas about birds" (p. 122). The sources he engages deeply for this section of the chapter are English-language sources, most articulated from a white settler viewpoint, whether in the figure of Eastern Cape missionary and settler Reverend Robert Godfrey, settler linguist Clement Doke, or settler anthropologist Eileen Krige (p. 123–124). While he cites Azariel Sekese's short story *'Pitso ea Linyonyane'*, Skotnes-Brown's sources for his account of this story are all secondary English-language sources (p. 122, and footnotes 78–81 on p. 282–283). Rather than referring to sources in Indigenous languages which the author did not read to draw conclusions about "African thinking" about the "economic relations between African groups and birds" (p. 122), I think the author should have been more frank about the limitations of the study.

There are African actors and voices included in the book. Chapter 2, 'Transporting Trypanosomes', is probably the most successful in this regard. Skotnes-Brown explores Indigenous knowledge about nagana in some detail, and shows how settler science simultaneously drew on this knowledge while representing it as unscientific. However, at other times, it seems as if the 'African voice' has been brought in post-facto, and tagged on to the analysis.

Skotnes-Brown does admit that African knowledge was not the "sole focus" of the study. Fair enough. However, in the Conclusion, he frames *Segregated Species* as a kind of foundational text in interspecies South African history which he hopes will encourage other scholars with "skills in Nguni languages" (why not Sotho-Makua-Venda?) to draw on linguistics, archaeology, and the "discovery of new archives" to explore further the work of African historical actors (p. 242). New methods or archives are not necessarily required for this kind of work. To continue with the example of Chapter 3 – a basic search for the Sotho word '*linonyana*' in Readex's African Newspapers collection brings up 202 articles in *Leselinyana la Lesutho*. A search for the Zulu '*izinyoni*' brings up 37 articles in *Ilanga lase Natal* and 35 articles in *Izindaba Zabantu*. The Xhosa word '*intaka*' returns 63 articles in *Imvo Zabantsundu*, 39 in *Izwi Labantu*, and 23 in *Isigidimi Sama-Xosa*. This is not to mention the numerous collections of oral traditions, proverbs and, indeed, monographs written by African authors in Indigenous languages. The sources are there. It is only language skills that are required to engage them seriously and on their own terms.

The second concern I have is with the author's conflation of so-called 'racism' and 'segregation' among certain animal groups with white supremacy and anti-black racism in settler colonial South Africa. While Skotnes-Brown claims to draw *connections* rather than make *comparisons* between settler strategies of categorisation and segregation among human and animal communities (p. 12), and that "the subjective experiences of animal and human oppression cannot be conflated or even compared" (p. 239), at times he does precisely this. For example, in Chapter 1, 'Domestication and Degeneration', he writes that, although "racist evolutionary and ecological thinking was typically associated with humans, elephants were also subjected to it" (p. 31). Due to "scientific racist ideas", settler science advocated for the preservation of elephants in a separate park, rather than assimilation into colonial society (p. 62). While the term 'race' may describe different species in general biological taxonomy, Skotnes-Brown here conflates actions regarding elephants with white supremacy and racism in the human,

historical, political realm. In the final chapter, Skotnes-Brown returns to the models used to preserve the Addo elephants in trying to make sense of the segregation of Khoe-San peoples in the Kalahari Gemsbok Park. Here he makes direct comparisons (not simply connections) between San peoples and elephants, writing that "the management of human and animal-kind was not just *connected*, as in other chapters, but strategies for managing animals were actively redeployed for the preservation of humans", and that we cannot understand the subjection of San communities in the 20th century without "recognizing their roots in game management and pest control" (p. 234). I think seeking the "roots" of settler colonial methods of dehumanising Indigenous communities in animal management during the 20th century can obscure the deep origins and global dimensions of white supremacist colonial conquest, domination and violence.

These few concerns aside, *Segregated Species* is an important contribution to the historiography of settler colonialism and settler scientific knowledge in southern Africa. Skotnes-Brown has done an exceptional job revealing the interconnections between settler colonial science and animal conservation and management. The book will be useful for historians of science, settler colonialism and the environment, as well as those interested in animal studies more broadly.