

Competition, race, and professionalization:  
African healers and white medical  
practitioners in Natal, South Africa in the early  
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# Competition, Race, and Professionalization: African Healers and White Medical Practitioners in Natal, South Africa in the Early Twentieth Century

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## SUMMARY

The licensing of African healers in the province of Natal, South Africa combined with urbanization, medical commodification, and an overcrowded biomedical market led to ideological and commercial competition between White biomedical practitioners and African healers in the early twentieth century in southeastern Africa. This article examines the historical antecedents of this competition and focuses on the role that competition, race, and gender played in the construction of local biomedical and African ideas of medical authority. Adopting the idea that medicine is an important site of power, contestation, and cultural exchange, I aim not only to document these historical changes in African therapeutics, but to problematize current ideas of biomedicine's colonial hegemony.

**Keywords:** [South Africa](#), [medical authority](#), [medical syncretism](#), [competition](#), [race](#), [professionalization](#), [African healers](#)

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