

Entertainment is often a medium in which you can put yourself front and center.

JOHN CENA
WWE star



ICYMI | IOL.CO.ZA

SOUTH AFRICA GETS 'JUNK' STATUS

Moody's downgraded South Africa's sovereign credit rating to "junk" status on Friday, heaping more misery on an economy already in recession and now staring down the barrel of a steep contraction over the global coronavirus pandemic. | IOL

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METRO

■ ACTOR

Future is bright for Ngubane

Actor clears air on rumours he was dumped by telenovela

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AFTER seven years on *Isibaya*, actor Menzi Ngubane recently bowed out from the telenovela, giving a stellar performance that led to the end of the notorious Judas Ngenya.

"I had such an incredible time on *Isibaya* alongside my fellow cast members, the crew and production team – together we share the passion for entertaining South Africans," he said.

"The last days were work as usual, however, I had to make sure that I pull up my best performance to ensure that my fans and South Africans are left with a brilliant performance."

Contrary to rumours of Ngubane being dumped by the show, he set the record straight and said his character had reached its end and that he parted ways with one of Mzansi Magic's leading shows on good grounds.

Widely celebrated for his role as the notorious taxi boss Ngenya, Ngubane's career dates back to the late 1980s when he landed the role of Cijimpi in *Kwakhala Nyonini*, he went on to become a household name as Sibusiso "Ngamla Dlomo" on *Generations*. A versatile thespian, Ngubane has also showcased his talent on international stages starring in various films.



ACTOR Menzi Ngubane is working on a new production that blends South African and Thai cultures. He set the record straight on the exit from *Isibaya*. | PABALLO THEKISO

"Cijimpi was where it all started. It opened up so many doors. Since playing the role of Cijimpi a lot of roles came my way, including opportunities to act alongside international stars such as Samuel

L Jackson. It's amazing how a lot of people still refer to me as Cijimpi, that shows the impact the drama series and my role had on them."

He initially wanted to become a lawyer, he recalled a conversation

he once had with his mother many years ago when she would remind him that his destiny was to be an actor due to his ability to narrate stories to her.

"I then met mom Lillian Dube

who sent me to my first audition. My acting career started blossoming during the days of *Kwakhala Nyonini*, even though I had also done theatre, appearing in *Street Sisters*, and a musical where I played the role of Enoch Sontonga," he said.

The future looks equally bright for Ngubane as he continues with his mentorship programme Boy Mentorship with Menzi. It aims to positively influence boys' lives.

He revealed that he was currently shooting *Red Cargo*, a South Africa / Thai production written and produced by Senzo Zindela of Sollywood Films in collaboration with Thai film legend Kao Tayarn and directed by Patrick Garcia.

"The film tackles various social ills including poaching, slavery and cultural prejudice. Furthermore, it blends the two cultures – South African and Thai through brilliant stick and martial art fighting."

Ngubane said he was most grateful for life, for the love that surrounds him and good health.

"Acting as a career can be tricky, however, staying committed to the craft, and respecting the people I work with and the public at large, has contributed to my sustainability."

"I am happy with where I am, very excited about life and all its possibilities and can't wait to continue conquering the world," he said.

■ CELEB

Dr Tumi volunteers at hospital

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GOSPEL singer and medical doctor, Dr Tumi, has put on his scrubs and stethoscope to assist in the fight against the spread of coronavirus.

He volunteered at Tembisa Hospital, one of Gauteng's three hospitals that have dedicated beds for Covid-19 patients.

"Having observed how overwhelmed the health-care workers are in countries like Italy, due to the large numbers of patients who need assistance, it became important to help," said Dr Tumi, whose real name is Tumisang Makweya.

The award-winning musician practised as a medical doctor for 12 years before making a switch.

He said he worked mainly in the private health-care sector and also spent three years at a hospital that treats TB.

"Everyone needs to play their role. Observe the regulations for lockdown. Stay at home and wash your hands thoroughly. If you have symptoms, seek medical attention and protect others."

South Africa's Covid-19 cases have sky-rocketed in just three weeks, peaking at over 1000 cases, with Gauteng accounting for the most numbers.

"I hope my step to volunteer will encourage others, who are able to help, to also lend a hand," he added.

Excavating pockets of hidden history for the public domain as a quest to (re) telling our South African history

Don Makatle

FRED KHUMALO's book, *Dancing the Death Drill*, won first prize in the "fiction, single-authored volume" category of the Humanities and Social Sciences Awards in 2019 for its brave historical and social relevance, contributing immensely in the (re) telling of the South African history yet avoiding the pitfalls of a one-sided story.

Khumalo is described by the judges as a master storyteller, who meticulously uses language to tell a sensitive and complex story, allowing the reader to follow the storyline until the end. The award attested to the book's unique contribution, if ever there was one.

"Yes, this was the first award for the book. In the same year it was longlisted for the Sunday Times Barry Ronge Literary Award and was shortlisted for the UJ Prize for South African Writing."

Khumalo is getting used to his books being adapted for the stage. First it was *Touch My Blood*. Yes, that was finely made for stage by veteran playwright James Ngcobo. It opened at the Grahamstown Arts Festival in 2007 and then proceeded to the Market Theatre.

And now, so too *Dancing the Death Drill*: "The play was adapted for the stage by the Cape Town-based theatre group Isango Ensemble (the creators of the movie *uCarmen eKhayelitsha*). The stage production opened at the Nuffield Theatre in Southampton. It then proceeded with performances at the Royal Opera House in London in 2019. The same year the production was also performed at the Bergen Arts Festival in Norway, and at the Brisbane Arts Festival in Australia," says Khumalo. As the author, he was invited to watch the performance in Norway.

Dancing the Death Drill is a literary marvel.

In literature, there is a saying that if it is easy to read, it was difficult to write: "*Dancing the Death Drill* was easily the most challenging book I'd ever written up to that point. Because it was inspired by and based on real events, I had to be careful about the facts: I couldn't alter real historical events that have been recorded: for example, the number of men who were on board the vessel, the date on which this happened, etc.

It was also challenging in that, it entailed a lot of research – I read newspaper reportage about the sinking of the *Mendi*." "Thankfully, the newspapers of the time covered the sinking properly. However, the stories of the black men who passed away were not told.

The men were just names and numbers. My job, therefore, was to give them lives; to humanise them. That was a major challenge. I had to read a bit about how black people used to dress back then; I had to imagine the interactions between black people from different cultural and linguistic groups.

Unlike today where we have crossed linguistic barriers to a certain extent, back then, it was difficult for a guy born and bred in Bloemfontein (and who'd never left his place of birth) to converse with a Zulu guy from Mahlabathini (who was venturing out of his own district for the first time, thanks to the outbreak of the war). So, I had to be careful with how I married facts, with the fictional creations of mine.

That was the research and conception. Then came the even more challenging part: writing. When I started writing I had to keep reminding myself that I was writing a novel, and not a history book. Therefore, the style had to be accessible. First and foremost, I had to get the reader interested. In other words, I had to entertain the reader. After all, why would the reader care about something that happened so long ago!" A writer's writer, he says:

"If the writing process was long and painful, the editing was even more excruciating. I had to be as unsentimental as I could – cutting, and cutting, and cutting. Kill your babies, they say in the industry. So, I had to kill a lot of beautiful scenes and passages, I had to get rid of important and very educative pieces of history – because I realised that, important as some of these nuggets of history were, they were slowing the story down. Almost drowning it.

Hence, I had to get rid of them. At all times, I had to keep reminding myself that this story was about real people: their descendants are with us. therefore, I had to treat the story with the respect it deserves."

"Cornelius is the epitome of human contradictions. At some point he contradicts some stereotypes about Afrikaner men – he truly does fall in love with Matshiliso. But at another level, he fulfils the stereotype of a typical Afrikaner man: he is scared of his mother. I made Cornelius to be larger than life so we could better explore the contradictions which are at the percussively throbbing heart of his personality."

In the Author's Note, Khumalo confesses to having always been fascinated by the story of the sinking of the *SS Mendi*. It is not difficult to see how the fascination unravels into a book. He makes the protagonist a virtually live character the reader can feel and reach out to touch. His father before him, Cornelius De La Rey, makes for engrossing reading, albeit briefly.

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The reader will love how Khumalo's pen hovers around the sinking without necessarily making a big ruckus about Reverend Isaac Wauchope Dyobha's seminal words.

Any lesser writer would have milked this much abused statement. Instead Khumalo chooses to pump blood into Pitso Mot-aung and make him real in our reading eyes.

"Yes, it was tempting to start the story with the dramatic moment when the ship starts sinking. It would have grabbed



Addressing the audience after receiving an award for the Best Fiction Single Authored Volume at the Humanities Awards last year, author Fred Khumalo's *Dancing the Death Drill* has been adapted to a stage play

the reader immediately. But then I realised, that the rest of the book would then be a long flashback. It would have been a major cheat. Most flashbacks tend to be an anti-climax – because we already know what will happen ultimately. Incidentally, this book taught me to use flashbacks very sparingly."

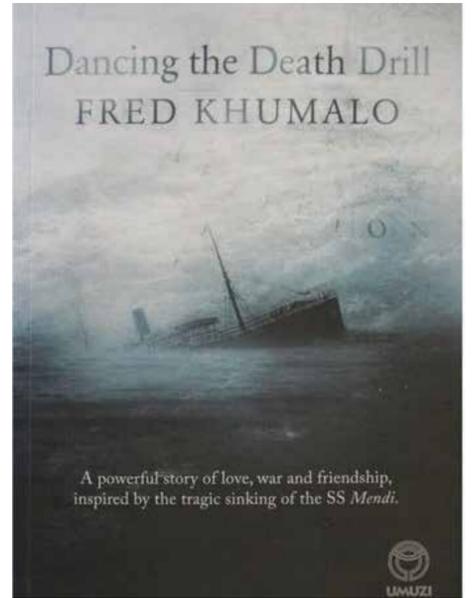
In France, there is a cemetery where the men of the *SS Mendi* are memorialised. Have we honoured them enough, in your view? I get a sense (you say so in the Editor's Note) that this is your own humble contribution to the memory.

Will you write more, not necessarily a sequel, to keep the fallen black South African soldiers from being just a footnote of history?

"I am happy to report that immediately after the publication of this book, I saw a flowering of literature about the sinking of the *SS Mendi*. A bulk of this literature came from historians within academia. We need more academic enquiry not only into the sinking of the *SS Mendi*, but into the role of black people in the many wars that made this country. But I will not be happy until our government bestows upon the men of the *Mendi* those long-overdue medals which they were denied back then. Even though this country bestows upon its heroes and heroines the Order of the *Mendi*, the men who went down with that ship have never had medals bestowed upon them, even posthumously."

Black African participation is often written out of history. Is it the role of writers to make sure revisionists do not get away with this, that the 'truth' is written?

Khumalo says: "In my own small way, I have taken it upon myself to re-inscribe black people into history. In the book, you will recall that I show, to some extent, how the so-called An-



Dancing the Death Drill is a brave socially relevant account, contributing in the (re)telling of an important history of our country

glo-Boer War impacted black people. Pitso, my main protagonist in this book, after all, is a product of the Anglo-Boer War. His father Cornelius is a Boer who has deserted from one of the commandos. In his flight, he ultimately takes refuge with the Bataung people. It is while he is in hiding that he falls in love with a Motaung woman. So, you can readily see how the war impacted black people. I take this theme further, in the book that came after *Dancing the Death Drill*. In *The Longest March*, I focus on a group of black men who have to flee Johannesburg at the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War. In their flight, some of them get commandeered by a Boer commando, and have to perform duties at gunpoint. So, yes, I have taken it upon myself to excavate these pockets of hidden history and put them back in the public domain."

"Right now, I am working on another historical novel, my third. It is a sequel to *The Longest March*, but happens against the backdrop of the much spoken about but least understood Bhambatha Rebellion of 1906."

"In excavating and putting on the pedestal these nuggets of history, I am hoping to make a contribution towards addressing the yawning gaps in the telling of our history, but will also spark debates in academia, the media and other public spaces. History never stops rewriting itself. In the oft-quoted story attributed to [famed Nigerian novelist Chinua] Achebe, it is said that until the lion learns to write, the story of the hunt will always be told from the perspective of the hunter."

"To which I say: now that the lion can read and write, it is time for him to roar his truth!" Having said all the serious stuff, I want my readers to be entertained. I am a storyteller who likes to laugh even in the middle of a gory, blood-letting scene. Because that is life. In my mother tongue we say: *kuyahleka noma kufiwa* (even in death, there's laughter). I want my readers to have fun. War stories can be fun. It is therefore not strange that my most successful stories – movies, books, etc – are about war!"