

**2018 Creative Works Award**  
**Citation for *Womb of Fire* (Theatre Production)**  
**Dr Sara Matchett**

**Conceptualised by Rehane Abrahams & Sara Matchett**

**Written & Performed by Rehane Abrahams**

**Directed by Sara Matchett**

**Designed by Craig Leo**

**Sonic-Scape by Lukhanyiso Skosana**

The nomination of *Womb of Fire* for a UCT Creative Arts Award was inspired by the work's insistence on addressing how violence in South Africa, over centuries, continues to play itself out on women's bodies. Set against an episode from the Indian epic, *The Mahabharata*, the play interweaves personal narrative and contemporary realities with the lives of two women from the founding years of the Cape Colony to interrogate the *Womb of Fire* that birthed South Africa. The play follows Grote Katrijn van Pulicat's (1681-1683) journey across India to Batavia and then to Cape Town as the first female bandit slave; it then explores the briefly brutal life of Zara (1648-1671), a Khoekhoen servant woman who was violently punished posthumously by the VOC for the crime of suicide. *Womb of Fire* looks at the power of the performing female body to challenge the pornography of Empire, in the process decolonising and retrieving itself. The play reaches back and forward across time to reassemble the dismembered body, allowing it to speak.

In terms of creative research, *Womb of Fire* attempts to translate the post-slave and post-colonial South African female body through personal performance practice. A philosophical interrogation of the translation of cultural memory through performance is traced through the work. Additionally, the production offers a pragmatic investigation that addresses translation both as an embodied activity of recalling erased memory and as a recuperation of the dis-membered post-slave /post-colonial female body. Through reflecting on an example of personal performance practice, *Womb of Fire* employs the performer and playwright's own post-slave body/post-colonial body as the locus of intersection between the private and the political, the biological and archival/historical.

Matchett interrogates translation as an embodied process that explores the body as a site for generating images for purposes of performance making. As such her method of performance making, in this context, addresses how the post-slave body practically translates the archival narratives, and in particular how these intersect with the biological/personal. Through an investigation of breath experienced as an embodied element that is sensed somatically by the performer, Matchett interrogates the potential of breath to act as a catalyst for activating and translating memories, stories, and experiences held in the body of the performer.