March 24, delivering the Earth Institute’s inaugural lecture in its ADVANCE program series. Her speech, “Changing the Demographics: Recruiting, Retaining and Advancing Women Scientists in Academia,” addressed the consequences of gender inequity in the sciences and what steps need to be taken to combat the problem.

Tilghman structured the issue on a national scale. By refusing to recognize and address the economic costs inherent in these inequities the nation is jeopardizing its ability to prosper and remain competitive, she said.

Tilghman noted that since World War II, science and technology have become a lynchpin of the evolving government-university affiance that has created much of the country’s vitality and economic success.

“We will have to attract into science and engineering more than our fair share of the best and brightest young minds from all over the world,” she said. “To restrict the science what varied wavelengths are to a prism: The more wavelengths, the richer the view.”

Tilghman said that failing to attract qualified women to the sciences will be every other discipline’s gain. “If women continue to be underrepresented in science, engineering and mathematics, these fields will look increasingly irrelevant that only now, and only in this country, are we finally recognizing the power of tolerance, and what steps need to be taken to combat the problem.”

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By Kristin Sterling

For more than five decades, Peter Brook has been an unconventional pioneer in the arts world, revered for his work that spans theater, film, opera and non-fiction writing. This is why it is particularly meaningful that only now, and only at Columbia University, Brook and his international theater company are integrating their work into the life and culture of a large urban university through a month-long residency organized by the Columbia University Arts Initiative.

The centerpiece of this residency is the U.S. premiere of Tierno Bokar, a theatrical exploration of the power of tolerance, set in 1930s French-ruled Africa. The work is a co-production of Brook’s International Center of Theatre Creation (CICT) in Paris and his Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, and was adapted by Marie-Helene Estienne from the West African writer Amadou Hampâté Bâ’s Life and Teaching of Tierno Bokar, the Sage of Bandiagara. For more information on the performance, which runs through April 26, go to www.tiernobokar.columbia.edu.

The production is based on the life of Tierno Bokar (1875-1939), a Sufi sage, a member of a distinguished clan and a spiritual leader in his village in Mali. His clan, exponents of repeating a Sufi prayer 12 times, was emboiled in a debate with a rival clan that advocated repeating it 11 times, which devolved into a conflict over power and leadership in the Tidjani Sufi Order. When Bokar eventually became a follower of Hamallah, a member of the rival clan, he was cast out by family, relatives and clan, branded a traitor and forbidden to teach or pray publicly. His enemies further ostracized him by collaborating with the colonial powers, portraying him as a fomenter of rebellion against French rule. Bokar died impoverished and isolated.

Brook’s Columbia residency, which is in partnership with Barnard College and the Harlem Arts Alliance, comprises a series of diverse educational activities. These academic symposia, discussions and film screenings, among other events, complement the performance, but are of interest all on their own. All the events are designed to appeal to students, faculty and administrators, and considered more than 60 written submissions.

To access the report and the administration’s endorsement of its findings and recommendations, go to: www.columbia.edu/cu/news/committee_report.html.

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utility and community members and draw on Columbia's wide-ranging academic resources and foster a dialogue about the social, political, religious and historical questions raised by the production. "Through all of these events, which will take place in various Columbia and Harlem venues, we will constantly explore Brook's idea that the only meaningful theater emerges from the idea of community, that it must reflect not the ideals of the elite or the lowest common denominator, but rather those in a community who see theater as a possibility for themselves of renewal," says Gregory Mosher, director of the Columbia University Arts Initiative and former Lincoln Center producer and director.

Vora Rivers, chair of the Harlem Arts Alliance, talked with WNYC's Brian Lehrer about the importance of Brook's performance and residency to Columbia and its surrounding community: "This is a tale set in Africa. It has a special resonance for people in the Harlem community, in particular, because Columbia University is in Harlem. And for our community to have an opportunity to see Peter's work — with a cast that comes from eight different countries — around a religious figure, a peaceful man, a man of talent, a man of understanding, is just so timely."

Added Mosher: "No university has ever made such a commitment to a project like this, and we have enormous hope that the reverberations will be far reaching and long lasting."

University faculty — from such diverse fields as religion, French, theater and international affairs — are among those playing an active role in the residency. Gregory Mann, an assistant professor of history at Columbia who was set to participate in the April 7 panel discussion "Tolerance in the West African Muslim Tradition," said, "Having Tierno Bokar produced on campus, by Peter Brook, with such a fabulous cast and a great crew is like receiving a wonderful crew gift. The play Tierno Bokar, brought to Columbia as an artistic endeavor, as an act of theatrical and spiritual searching, makes it clear that Africa still has much to teach the world about what are — or should be — universal values of tolerance."

Other special events have included "Prologue" and "Epilogue" discussions led by Louis Brenner, a Columbia alumus and a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London; a discussion with Brook at Miller Theatre; an "Introduction to Global Sufism" by Peter Awn, dean of the School of General Studies; as well as screenings of films such as Brook's Lord of the Flies and African actor Sotigui Kouyate's (who plays the role of Tierno Bokar) Genesis and Keita, l'Héritage du Griot.

"We are using these screenings not only to discuss Peter Brook's work, but also as a springboard to other topics, like art's place in politics, which is so relevant today," says Garth Bardsley, SOA '06, who is one of the students directly involved with the residency as an organizer of the film screenings. "Most people in the U.S. don't know that Sotigui is one of Africa's most important actors."

The film series continues in the coming days with screenings of Brook's Marat/Sade on April 19, as well as Kouyate's Golem, l'Esprit de l'Exil on April 13, La Vie sur Terre on April 20, and Keita, l'Héritage du Griot on April 25. Other upcoming events also include an April 9 lecture titled "Religion and Politics in the Theater of Peter Brook," by Michael Kustow, author of Peter Brook: A Biography, and moderated by Mosher. A complete schedule of events is accessible at www.tiernobokar.columbia.edu/events.html.

In addition to these special events, most of which are free and open to the public, Columbia Center for New Media Teaching and Learning (CCNMTL) has created a Web site of classroom resources for Columbia faculty and students at ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/tiernobokar/. Among the resources is an essay outlining the issues that should be considered when approaching Tierno Bokar as well as interviews with faculty members Awn, Ousmane Kane, associate professor at the School of International and Public Affairs, and Mann. Video interviews cover topics ranging from Sufism and Islam in West Africa to Amadou Hampâté Bâ and the message of Tierno Bokar.

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—Gregory Mosher
director, Columbia University Arts

The comprehensive Web site also includes a bibliography of print and Web resources for further study; a timeline of West African history spanning from the Songhay Era in the 1400s to present day; a glossary of key people and terms related to Tierno Bokar; slideshows ranging from maps of West African Empires and ancient and modern Mali, to esoteric writing; and film footage from Susan Vogel's Living Memory: Six Sketches of Mali to Keita, l'Héritage du Griot.

This semester, the Columbia: University Arts Initiative has spear headed various events, including organized bus tours of "The Gates" exhibit in Central Park and a speaker series. The next event in the series is April 8, when Jonathan Safran Foer, author of Everything Illuminated and Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, will be in conversation with Jeffrey Brown arts correspondent for The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer.

For complete information about the Brook residency, performances events schedule, and classroom resources, visit www.tiernobokar.columbia.edu