This Past Year ...

by Pushpa Iyer

2014-2015 was a year that we at the Center will remember as a year we innovated, a year we took a stand, and a year where we once again stayed true to our mission of bridging theory and practice. Our academic, research and practice programs bear testimony to the fact that we have become a platform for scholars and practitioners to engage in discussions on current events and conflict issues that plague our society today. The following pages provide a brief report of our work this past year. We are proud of our efforts, especially given the fact that we work with such limited resources. We do, however, have an army of supporters and to them we owe much of our success in all our programs.
ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Police Legitimacy in Communities of Color

The Center hosted a well-attended roundtable discussion on “Police Legitimacy in Communities of Color” on Oct. 9, 2014. Participants were MIIS students, faculty, staff and members of the wider Monterey community, along with the three featured speakers, Rosemary Soto of Salinas, Will Matthews of the Northern California ACLU, and Kelly McMillin, Salinas Chief of Police.

The roundtable format of the event gave participants the opportunity to address issues directly with each guest speaker and to have an interactive conversation within each of the three roundtable groups, providing space for each participant to have their voice heard. Attendees sat in one of three circles, with the guest speakers rotating among the groups, and members of the MIIS campus community facilitated conversations. Sara Rubin of the Monterey County Weekly called the discussion “impressive” on her Twitter feed and praised MIIS students as “assertive and articulate.”

Participants praised the event saying it had fostered the kind of constructive dialogue and respectful interaction between law enforcement and communities of color that is essential to achieving positive change.

This event is an example of how the Center is beginning to be recognized for taking a stand on issues that are central to the community amongst which MIIS functions. Held in the background of the police shootings in Salinas (a neighboring town of Monterey), the announcement of the event brought a lot of opposition. Much of the opposition was directed toward the Salinas Chief of Police being one of the discussants. The Center stood firm in its argument that the roundtable event was necessary to foster much needed dialogue in the community.

Peacebuilders Fellowship (Cont’d.)

graduate students. With the Center’s focus on water conflicts, Fellows were tasked to gather stories of individuals who are stakeholders in water conflict.

Nine Fellows came from different parts of the world – Spain, U.S., Germany, New Zealand, Mexico and Thailand – and were given online training on conducting field research pre-departure. They traveled to four countries: Burma (Myanmar), Mexico, Ethiopia, and the West Bank to gather water stories. Fellows spent six to eight weeks in the field meeting organizations and individuals working on water conflicts. Using a variety of audio-visual means, they documented the experiences of those who struggled to gain access to water or were denied access to water. They studied water conservation systems and conflict resolution mechanisms in place for ending water conflicts. Our hope is that the individual stories will give face to a “distant” conflict, providing empirical knowledge, which in turn will empower people to act. Therefore, Peacebuilder Fellows are storytellers for peace.

Phoenix McLaughlin, one of the Peacebuilder Fellows had this to say: “By spending two months traveling around Ethiopia meeting countless new people, I can now put a face to the many water issues facing the country, as well as the countless efforts to solve them. The Peacebuilder Fellowship gave me a newfound understanding of the importance of water in the life of an individual, community, and nation.”

The interest generated by this fellowship program and the lessons learnt from the 2014 inaugural program (which emphasized the need for more skills development training on conducting field research) will shape future Fellowship programs.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Certificate in Conflict Resolution

The Center continues to manage the certificate in conflict resolution program offered by the Graduate School of Policy and Management at MIIS. There were at least seven incoming students in Fall ’14 who declared their intent to pursue the certificate program. The certificate is designed so that the students are able to pursue it concurrently with their degree programs at
Certificate in Conflict Resolution (Cont’d.)

MIIS. The certificate requires students to take an Introductory and an Exit course and includes a required practice component. Students from all degree programs at MIIS may pursue the certificate, although it is usually the students of policy studies who pursue this certificate.

The Praxis of Conflict Transformation (Los Angeles)

“The Praxis of Conflict Transformation” is an academic field course in which students examine deep-rooted structural conflicts and the practice of transforming the conditions of conflict and relationships of those involved in these conflicts. The field component of this course is organized during spring break (March) and usually focused on a city in the United States.

In March 2015, the course traveled to Los Angeles where students studied poverty, homelessness and violence. Six students from MIIS participated in this course. Participants interacted with NGOs and civil society members to learn first hand about how they work on these deep-rooted violent conflicts in the context of racial tensions, extreme wealth and other structural imbalances. There were visits to areas in downtown (Skid Row), east, west and south Los Angeles.

The students remarked that the course was transformational as it challenged them to reflect on their own responses to conflict situations, especially ones that revolved around identity.

Challenges to Peacebuilding (Mindanao) (Cont’d.)

and civil society. Traveling through various regions in central and north Mindanao, students remarked that it was an eye-opening and life-changing experience not just in terms of learning about the conflict and peacebuilding efforts but through meeting people who dealt with violence and conflict in their everyday lives.

Nine students from MIIS and three students from California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB) participated in the course.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Conflicts Over Water and Building Bridges with Water

by Kystrie Lane

CCS hosted its third annual conference, “Conflicts Over Water and Building Bridges with Water,” from Nov. 6-8, 2014. The conference aimed to highlight the complexities of water conflicts and share approaches made by conflict resolvers, communities, institutions, and governments in resolving these conflicts.

The conference opened with a keynote address from Carmel Mayor Jason Kestrel Burnett, who drove home the point that water conflicts are happening right here on the peninsula. He stressed the need for water conversation and also the need for policy changes. The conference hosted 24 presenters, including MIIS faculty, Ph.D. candidates, practitioners, and scientists. Presentations ranged from case studies, conflict histories, and educational tactics to scientific research, environmental concerns, and policy approaches. Presenters addressed water conflicts in California, Detroit, Guatemala, Ethiopia, Egypt, India, Mexico, Gaza, and more, thus demonstrating the huge scope and complexity of these problems as well as highlighting the vast
Conflicts Over Water and Building Bridges with Water (Cont’d.)

Conference attendees were left with a strong knowledge of the urgency of water conflicts and scarcity, but also inspiring examples of action being taken and ideas for future policy and programs.

At the end of the conference, Paul Hicks of the Catholic Relief Services, and one of the presenters, summarized our thoughts in a tweet: “We need better data for good conflict management.” Much more work still needs to be done.

BOOK LAUNCH EVENT

Blood in the Fields

By Kyrstie Lane

On Sept. 10, CCS hosted a reading and discussion with investigative reporter Julie Reynolds on her new book, "Blood in the Fields." Julie has spent over a decade exhaustively researching gang violence in nearby Salinas and the infamous prison gang, Nuestra Familia. Her book addresses the history of the gang, the huge impact it has had on this agricultural community, and steps that have been taken to prevent its further rise in influence and violence.

Julie read passages from her book and shared further details and background about the stories the work recounts and her experiences in researching the gang, as well as what the future might look like in Salinas in relation to this history of violence. Julie also highlighted her findings on the role of women and girls in the gangs in Salinas, which has been the focus of her work as a Visiting Scholar (2013-2014) at CCS.

There were around 25 participants at the event, many of them from the Monterey community. Julie’s book was well received, with everyone leaving the venue in admiration of her work and what was undoubtedly a very difficult topic to research.

BOOK CLUB EVENT

I Am Troy Davis

By Kristen Cardoso

Fifteen students, faculty and staff gathered last semester (Nov. 18, 2014) to discuss race, the death penalty, and the story of Troy Davis in an event cosponsored by the Center and the William Tell Coleman Library. As one of many events happening across the country as part of the Troy Davis Community Book Club, the discussion centered around the reading of I Am Troy Davis by human rights activist Jen Marlowe and Davis’s sister Martina Davis-Correia.

The book tells the story of Troy Davis through his own words and those of his closest family and friends. It was not required that participants read the book to attend, although those who did found it hard to put down. Troy’s story is not an easy one to read – the type of struggle he and his family endured continues to disproportionately affect African-Americans. The discussion about the book quickly became an important one about the injustices of the criminal justice system in the United States toward the African-American community. Students questioned the continued use of the death penalty in the United States as well as other countries, and considered the connections between capital punishment and racial inequality. Participants also shared their own experiences of bias and violence perpetrated against themselves or friends and family as people of color. The conversation moved on to racial differences as experienced on the MIIS campus by both students and faculty. Everyone agreed in the end that it was a much-needed discussion. The success of the event demonstrated a strong desire and need on the part of the MIIS community to come together and engage on these difficult-to-discuss issues.