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Canadian Law and Society Association Midwinter Conference

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Conference commented on: [Canadian Law and Society Association Midwinter Meeting](#)

I recently attended the midwinter meeting of the Canadian Law and Society Association in Toronto. This meeting combines a small academic conference with a board meeting, mid-way between our annual meetings. The program is available [here](#).

The conference was attended by about 30 people, a mixture of university professors and graduate students from law, socio-legal programs, and other academic programs and departments that house scholars concerned about law and social problems and policies. This variety showed itself in the program. A couple of papers by were concerned largely with the circulation of images and the way that images that capture a particular moment may take on a life of their own, for better or for worse. Rashmee Singh and Dawn Moore discussed databases containing photos of victims of domestic violence, photos that can be useful for prosecutorial purposes but can also end up circulating almost as a kind of pornography. Lara Karaian's presentation considered photos that young women in their teens may take of themselves and "sext" to others and the difficulties inherent in recent efforts, mainly in the United States, to treat these teenagers as criminals for voluntarily putting such images of themselves into circulation.

We had various presentations related to property. Maneesha Deckha presented on our conception of animals as property, with the disturbing treatment of them that this conception enables. Estair van Wagner considered attachments to property that are not manifest as ownership. Sara Seck and Derek McKee explored challenges in international law relating to the environment and state norms. Brenna Keatinge described the conversion of "unused" or "vacant" urban spaces in Boston to commercial agriculture and how those changes have affected the poor communities in which those spaces tend to be located. She identified blindspots in environmental initiatives, such as an effort to encourage recycling by permitting garbage collectors to pick up only a particular kind of garbage bag, which cost about \$0.75 each. Poor neighbourhoods became overwhelmed with garbage, as people for whom spending money on special garbage bags seemed economically untenable simply dumped their trash in the streets. Some ideas need a little more thought.

In a roundtable format, we talked about challenges in doing socio-legal research, and we tried to

provide some advice and reassurance to graduate students as they move into the field. We discussed concerns about being misunderstood when called upon to be expert witnesses or prepare research for interested parties, such as governments. We discussed getting access to archival sources, government records and some groups of people. We talked about doing research with vulnerable communities who may be glad to be the subject of research but are also concerned about how they will be seen publicly if all of their internal debates are aired. Emily Snyder's paper, in one of the other panels, examined some of these issues more deeply in the context of First Nations communities.

One theme that emerged, and one particularly interesting to me, concerned the emergence of legal norms and their interaction with positive law. Anna Dolidze's paper considered how the idea of the trust was the basis of the "mandate" form of government developed after World War I. Natalie Oman talked about ways of incorporating norms put forward by non-state actors into international law. My own paper talked about race in Canadian constitutionalism before 1867.

I am pleased to add that the [2014 annual meeting of the Canadian Law and Society Association](#) will be held in Winnipeg from June 6-8 (and will overlap with the annual meeting of the [Canadian Association of Law Teachers](#) (CALT)). I am even more pleased to be able to announce that the annual meeting in 2016 will be held at the University of Calgary, as part of the [Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences](#). We at the Faculty of Law look forward to dusting off our white hats and rolling out our red carpet for this occasion, which also coincides with the 50th anniversary of our university.

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