The Haldane Society Feminist Lawyers network (HFL) is a sub-group of the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers. The group formed in 2013 following a resolution by the executive committee for its activities that year to focus on fighting the UK Government’s cuts, privatisation, and the economic policies of austerity.

The housing crisis, the prevalence of zero hours contracts, and the fact that legal aid are all side effects of an economic crisis in which women and other marginalised groups are disproportionately paying the price of austerity. It has been within this context that the group arose to staunchly stand in opposition to capitalism, sexism, rape culture, racism, and discrimination.

We seek to analyse the law and legal systems from a socialist and feminist perspective. We aim to give women and allies a friendly space to discuss these issues openly within a supportive environment, as well as give support and our solidarity to other groups which strive for equality and justice both in the UK and internationally.

Members of the HFL are of the opinion that because oppression does not occur in a vacuum, it can often be helpful to analyse legal and social problems through the approach of intersectional feminism, i.e. feminism which discusses the ways in which racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, and other forms of oppression are interconnected, on the principle that one cannot examine one form of oppression in isolation from the other.

In spring 2013, the HFL organised as part of the Haldane Human Rights Lecture Series a lecture entitled ‘Trafficking: Law and Politics’, which heard from Jamila Duncan-Bosu, a solicitor at the Anti-Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit, and Kate Roberts, a community advocate at Kalayaan. Kate Roberts is also a campaigner for domestic migrant workers. This lecture focused on the vulnerable legal status of domestic workers. There was an analysis of the remedies in law that need to be utilised and further developed so as to ensure legal protections and the most basic of employment rights.

In autumn 2013, the HFL ran a reading group. Our first text, Eve Was Framed, is written by one of the Vice Presidents of the Haldane Society, Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, and examines chiefly how women are treated unequally by a legal system which houses social biases. This reading group encourages open discussions and is group-led. We will continue this reading group in autumn 2014.

The HFL organised another human rights lecture, which featured family law barrister Elizabeth Woodcraft and Professor Alison Diduck of University College London who spoke on the topic of ‘How to Be a Feminist Lawyer’. The question of whether one could, in fact, be a feminist lawyer at all sparked an immensely passionate and engaging debate with both the speakers and the audience.

At our formal launch event in spring 2014, we defined our motivations and aims, including supporting women and marginalised groups, educating others regarding the shortfalls of the legal system, and campaigning for changes in both the law and in legal practice towards a more equal and decent society. We have also launched a Facebook group as a platform to share legal articles, start discussions, and promote the events and projects in the activist and legal community.

Our membership has grown steadily as the group approaches the end of its first year. Over the coming months we will be organising our second annual reading group, among other activities. We invite suggestions from members about how to expand our group and its activities.

Contact us by email at feminism@haldane.org or visit our Haldane Feminist Lawyers Facebook page to get involved.

Natalie Csengeri

May

1: Judge Anthony Leonard QC stays the “Operation Cotton” fraud trial, saying the defendant did not receive a fair trial owing to an absence of legal representation. Barristers refused work at new rates of remuneration creating another crisis for Justice Secretary Chris Grayling. The Court of Appeal later reversed the ruling.

2: The High Court finds that the Ministry of Defence breached English law, Afghan law, and international humanitarian law by allowing Afghans to be held beyond a 96-hour limit on British military bases.

2: Control orders against two men who were detained in Somalia, allegedly beaten and subjected to a mock execution before being flown to the United Kingdom, are quashed. Lord Justice Kay criticised the High Court for hearing evidence behind closed doors so that the appellants and public were denied knowledge of the extent to which their case was accepted or rejected.

3: Haldane Society members attend the 40th birthday party of News from Nowhere – Liverpool’s radical community bookshop. Held at the iconic Adelphi hotel, music and partying followed a conference earlier in the day entitled ‘Liverpool – city of working class resistance’ at which various campaigns including the struggle against the bedroom tax convened.