

## **Astor Visit Report – Professor Helen Kinsella**

Professor Patricia Owens and I (Laura Sjoberg) were fortunate enough to host Professor Helen Kinsella as the Astor Visiting Lecturer at the Department of Politics and International Relations during the first week in May of 2025. Professor Helen Kinsella is Professor of Political Science and Law at the University of Minnesota, and has worked with a variety of international organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross and Fulbright. Professor Kinsella's area of specialization is gender and armed conflict, with emphasis on questions of how to understand the concept of the civilian and the ways that civilians are treated during wars and conflict.

The first evening that Professor Kinsella (May 1 2025) was here, she participated in Professor Owens' book launch for her new book, *Erased: A History of International Thought without Men* (Princeton University Press, 2025). Professor Kinsella served as a discussant for the book launch, which was held at Sommerville College. More than sixty members of the Oxford community attended the book launch, including about a dozen graduate students from the Department of Politics and International Relations. Professor Kinsella's comments provided significant enrichment to the event.

Professor Kinsella then delivered the Astor Lecture on the evening of May 2 2025. The Astor Lecture was entitled, "Beyond Mere Inconvenience: The United States and Civilian Harm," and was delivered in the Department of Politics and International Relations Lecture Theatre. Professor Kinsella discussed the ways that contemporary warfare technologies and political structures interact to constitute the contemporary United States' conceptions of what a civilian is, and how to deal with legal and moral issues surrounding civilian protection. Professor Kinsella discussed the gendered and raced framings of the image of the civilian both broadly and in its contemporary instantiations, before discussing in depth some related policy documents and policy statements. Professor Kinsella spoke for around three quarters of an hour, and then spent the same amount of time answering questions from an audience of around fifty academic staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students from the social sciences. After the talk and formal question and answer session, Professor Kinsella continued to talk with graduate students for an hourlong reception before a dinner hosted at Exeter College with members of academic staff with cognate research interests.

In the rest of the time that Professor Kinsella was at Oxford, she was able to do work one-on-one with coauthors on co-conceived projects (particularly Professor Owens and Professor Sjoberg), meet with other members of academic staff as individuals or in small groups (including Dr Meera Sabaranatam and Dr Edward Keene), and run a mentoring session for the Department's DPhil and research MPhil students. The mentoring session was held May 5 at the Cohen Quad campus of Exeter College for nearly three hours. Eleven graduate students came to the session to receive general career advice as well as to talk specifically about their research projects' directions. Professor Kinsella listened to the students, gave excellent advice, and, where appropriate, provided access to her professional networks both in the academic field and in the policy world. After the mentoring session, Professor Kinsella met individually with two of the Department's DPhil students whose research fit most closely with hers in order to provide individualized advice and discuss potential collaborative research.