

PROJECT TITLE

Data protection surrounding mass graves

PROJECT SUMMARY

Identification often forms a crucial aspect of mass grave investigations, though it is commonly understood as an obligation of means. The identification of human remains is a precondition for the return of remains to families to facilitate commemorative practices but also for the family to receive a death certificate. In scenarios where large numbers of human remains are found in mass graves, DNA testing by an accredited laboratory is a reliable way to make science-led identifications, but it may not be readily available in-country.

As new technologies for identification emerge, concerns surrounding access to, and protection of, information and individuals' data are likely to persist and even increase, with leading experts in migrant family reunification calling for 'international guidelines and best practices for a DNA-led approach'¹. Significantly, emerging technologies require explication not only in terms of the type of information they reveal (for example, new DNA technology called short tandem repeats (STRs)) but also on how the information might render itself to exploitation beyond the main identification purpose.

The cross-border transfer of this information, its vulnerabilities, third party involvement, data sharing and disposition are all areas for review. Whilst there is some general discussion of the issue in the literature clear linkages to mass grave investigations would help to ensure that a DNA-led framework (including database management, informed consent, sampling, analysis, chain of custody and reporting standards) is compatible with a human rights framework.

This PhD project will analyse, and where needed proffer, good governance in relation to data and sample protection, transfer, storage, disposition, ownership and sharing, thereby making a vital contribution to families and all stakeholders involved in investigation and identification processes.

ACADEMIC IMPACT

Commensurate with legal research approaches, the project is likely to employ desk-based doctrinal legal research, and, where appropriate, supplement or complement with empirical legal research. This research will fill an important human rights blind spot in the present human rights theory surrounding mass graves.

The research will also form part of the outputs produced as part of the [Mass Grave Protection and Investigation \(MaGPIE\)](#) Research project.

MaGPIE, in its ambition to develop a pioneering and comprehensive human rights framework for the engagement with mass graves, has three overarching objectives.

1. To produce a global quantitative and qualitative assessment of the scale of the phenomena that are mass graves;
2. To remedy associated blindspots within the existing human rights framework; and

3. To create policies that innovate, consolidate and implement a coherent human rights approach to mass grave engagement.

This PhD project will form an integral part of the second objective.

SOCIETAL IMPACT

This PhD project seeks to identify and remedy the human rights blindspot that presently exists within mass grave engagement. Advancing theory will also advance policy and practice thus benefitting survivors of mass graves and communities affected by them.

Since MaGPIE has a policy producing strand to it, this PhD project will contribute to policy development including an updated version of the Bournemouth Protocol on Mass Grave Protection and Investigation.

PGR DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The student will be embedded in the ERC selected and UKRI funded research project MaGPIE and thus be part of a world-leading team of experts on the subject of mass graves led by Professor Melanie Klinkner.

In addition, the University, through the Doctoral College will help guide the professional and personal development of each PhD student through its [researcher development programme](#).

Furthermore, the successful applicant will benefit from a team of multiple expert supervisors, and offers the opportunity for a placement at the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) in The Hague, The Netherlands. The ICMP is the most relevant and applicable 'industry' to the research project: as the only international organisation that is exclusively tasked with addressing the issue of missing persons, ICMP is actively engaged in developing institutions and civil society capacity, promoting legislation, fostering social and political advocacy, and developing and providing technical expertise to locate and identify the missing.

SUPERVISORY TEAM

First Supervisor	Professor Melanie Klinkner
Additional Supervisors	Member of the ICMP and Dr Jane Henriksen Bulmer, Principal Academic In Computer Science and data protection expert.
Recent publications by supervisors relevant to this project	<p>Smith S. and Klinkner M., eds. 2023. Mass Graves, Truth and Justice: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Investigation of Mass Graves. Edward Elgar.</p> <p>Smith, E. and Klinkner, M., 2023. Victims' Rights to Participation and their Legitimate Information Interests. In: Borghi, M. and Brownsword, R., eds. Law, Regulation and Governance in the Information Society Informational Rights and Informational Wrongs. Routledge.</p> <p>Henriksen-Bulmer, J., Yucel, C., Faily, S. and Chalkias, I., 2022. Privacy Goals for the Data Lifecycle. Future Internet, 14 (11).</p> <p>Klinkner, M., 2022. Mass grave protection and missing persons. In: Parra, R. and Ubelaker, D., eds. Anthropology of Violent Deaths: Theoretical Foundations for Forensic Humanitarian Action. Wiley & sons.</p>

	<p>Klinkner, M. and Smith, E., 2021. Academic Commentary to the Bournemouth Protocol on Mass Grave Protection and Investigation. Bournemouth University.</p> <p>Klinkner, M. and Smith, E., 2020. The Bournemouth Protocol on Mass Grave Protection and Investigation.</p>
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INFORMAL ENQUIRIES
<p>Please contact the lead supervisor on the following email for informal enquiries</p> <p>magpie@bournemouth.ac.uk or mklinkner@bournemouth.ac.uk</p>
ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
<p>The PhD Studentship is open to UK, EU and International students.</p> <p>Candidates should demonstrate outstanding qualities and be motivated to complete a PhD in 3 years and must demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outstanding academic potential as measured normally by either a 1st class honours degree (or equivalent Grade Point Average (GPA) or a Master’s degree with distinction or equivalent. • an IELTS (Academic) score of 7.5 minimum (with a minimum 6.5 in each component, or equivalent) for candidates for whom English is not their first language and this must be evidenced at point of application.
ADDITIONAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
<p>We welcome applicants with diverse backgrounds and expertise in international law or a related subject. We expect the PhD student to be Bournemouth University Campus based for full integration with the research team.</p>
HOW TO APPLY
<p>Please complete the online application form by the deadline listed on the project webpage.</p> <p>Further information on the application process can be found at: www.bournemouth.ac.uk/studentships</p>

ⁱ Barnert, E. et al. (2021) ‘Using DNA to reunify separated migrant families’ (2021) *Science – Policy Forum* (online preprint) at page 3.