In August 2015 Dr Claire Moon, Department of Sociology and Centre for the Study of Human Rights, conducted field research in Mexico into the forensic investigation of clandestine mass graves arising out of the government’s ‘war on organized crime’. Since 2006 and in this context an estimated 150,000 Mexican citizens and undocumented migrants have been killed or ‘disappeared’. Around 20,000 bodies have been recovered from a number of grave sites but remain unidentified.

The research investigated the practices and principles of a number of organizations and forensics initiatives including the Red Cross, the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), the Mexican Forensic Anthropology Team (EMAF), the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP), and the innovative and controversial citizen-led DNA project, *Gobernanza Forense Cuidadano*, run by family members of the disappeared. The research addressed forensic identification, the care of the dead, the emotional labour of forensic work, and raised the question of whether it can be argued that the dead have human rights. It also looked at conflicts of approaches within the forensic field.

Mexico is a unique case study because no state or non-state organization has as yet made (or been able to make) a systematic attempt to identify the disappeared and because family groups, who cannot rely on state investigations, are mobilizing their own forensic technologies with the aim of finding and identifying missing relatives and pursuing the rights to truth and justice.

The Mexican case is one of a number of cases that features in Claire’s current book project on forensics, science and human rights. The book addresses the ‘forensic turn’ in human rights by advancing a historical account of its emergence, professionalization, and global proliferation, and proposing a theoretical framework within which to understand the social and political significance of forensic techniques in the adjudication of atrocity and the amelioration of social suffering. It applies this historical and theoretical work across a number of case studies, including Argentina, Spain and Mexico.

The fieldtrip was supported by the LSE’s RIIF Seed Fund.