Thanks to the generous support of the DUCIGS Graduate Awards for Research and Training program, I recently participated in the Annual Memory Studies Association Conference in Madrid, which gathered 1,500 scholars, artists, and memorial practitioners from across the globe. The program featured twice as much content as the previous editions in Amsterdam and Copenhagen, proving that Memory Studies is an emerging and exciting research field. The increasing relevance of the field, beyond academic settings, was confirmed by the impact that the conference had on the Spanish national press. Newspapers such as EL PAÍS, La Vanguardia, and eldiario.es devoted several articles to cover the development of the congress. Having had the opportunity to attend this conference was extremely helpful, as I seek to establish myself as a young researcher in the field of Memory Studies.

During the conference, I participated in a number of activities, such as panels, excursions, workshops, and keynote talks. I also presented my paper, titled “La Negra y la Violeta: La (re)construcción de referentes latinoamericanas a través del biopic musical”¹. I originally wrote this paper for a seminar at Duke University called “Memory and Documentary Cinema in Latin America”, taught by Prof. Gustavo Furtado. I wanted to rewrite the piece to include it in my portfolio exams, and in this conference, I found a perfect chance to share this work outside of Duke and receive external feedback on my analysis. At the conference, my paper was placed in a panel called “Performing Memory in the Arts and the Media”. The panel was formed by distinguished scholars, such as Paul Julian Smith (CUNY), leading professors in my field such as David Rodriguez-Solas (UMASS Amherst), and younger researchers such as Malena Corte (CIS-IDES, CONICET) and myself. The different presentations spoke to each other in very interesting ways, and I found their papers thought-provoking and beneficial for my research. However, this was just one of the many panels I attended, since this four-day event allowed me to sit and learn from many other discussions. Among the many, the one that was most beneficial (for my main research on protest music during dictatorships) was the one entitled “Unpacking Embodied Memories in Dressing, Music and Dance”, since

¹ The titled could be translated as: “Violet and Black: The (Re)construction of Latin American Idols through their Musical Biopics”. “Violet”, la Violeta, is the shortcut name for the Chilean singer-songwriter Violeta Parra. Then, the nickname for the Argentinian singer Mercedes Sosa is “La negra” (literally translated as “the black-one”).
I got in touch with another PhD candidate studying music during Francoism, Iria Ameixeiras Cundins (Columbia University).

Second, the conference also allowed me to participate in a very enriching excursion to visit the remains of the prison of Carabanchel, which was built by political prisoners after the Spanish Civil War. We visited the spot where the prison used to be, together with activists and local collectives that want it to be a memory site. They are also fighting against the only building still in existence, a migrant detention center, the “CIE de Aluche”, popularly known as “The Spanish Guantanamo”. The picture shows the wall of the old prison, today’s CIE, with the surveillance camera and a blood stain that activists had painted as an act of protest. The visit was part of a methodology workshop where we practiced interdisciplinarity and exercised in collaboration/research co-creation. To prepare for the workshop, we had some assigned readings about the history of the site we were to visit. Then, after the excursion, we gathered in groups to design a project that responds to “Carabanchel” and present our material as a “poster”. I joined the group lead by the well-known Argentinean scholar Elizabeth Jelin. We decided to focus on the continuities and discontinuities of violence in this site, since we considered that today’s detention center replicates many of the human rights violations that took place during Francoism at the prison. Therefore, we wanted to highlight and denounce that this site does not only host a violent past, but also a violent present. With this project, not only did I learn about this site of memory, but I also enjoyed the collaborating workshop, in which I took the role of spokesperson and presented the poster to the other groups.

Third, since the conference gathered the most prestigious experts in Memory Studies, I was able to attend master classes, special sessions, and keynote talks. I chose to participate in a masterclass about “Qualitative interviewing”, taught by Emily Keightley (Loughborough University). For my PhD thesis I will need to conduct several interviews with important figures for my research. I found this master class particularly useful, since it introduced me to a range of qualitative interviewing techniques, from formal one-to-one interviewing to self-interviewing, and made me consider their application in Memory Studies research. As for the special session, I was particularly thrilled to listen to the conversation between Marianne Hirsch (Columbia University) and Mirta Kupferminc (Argentinean independent artist), connected to one of the Exhibitions showed during the congress, called “Women Mobilizing Memory in Arts of Intervention”. Finally, I attended a crowded keynote talk delivered by Aleida Assmann where she reflected on the need to reimagine the nation through memory and emotions in our current time, when we are experiencing the rise of far right-wing nationalism around the globe.

Overall, attending MSA 2019 in Madrid was a great experience, both professionally and personally, and I am thankful to have had the opportunity to attend this conference through the support of the Duke community, and in particular DUCIGS.