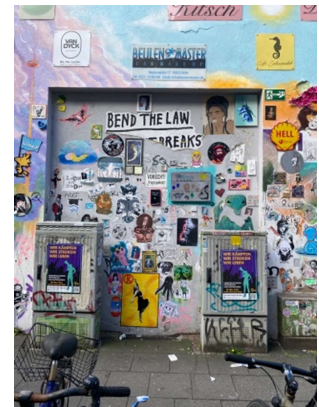


Patrick Higgins Travel Prize 2025

With the generous help of the Patrick Higgins travel grant, I traveled to Cologne, Germany over the spring vacation. I visited to Cologne in order to explore the role of Islam and pluralism in contemporary German society. Cologne has been a major location for negotiating the role of non-Christian faiths in public life, and visiting in person allowed me to speak with local people about their perspectives on current tensions in German society and politics.

I stayed in Ehrenfeld, which is a busy neighborhood in the northwest of Cologne. One reason that I stayed here was to be close to the Cologne Central Mosque, which is famous for being the first place in Cologne where the call to prayer was broadcast outdoors. On the first day, I visited the Cologne Central Mosque and spoke to the administrators. It was Ramadan and so everyone was very busy, yet the people that I chatted with were kind enough to talk with me a bit about their role in the institution and their experiences in the city at large. Overall, many expressed that they were overwhelmingly supportive of the measures that the city had taken to accommodate public displays of faith, yet were also deeply apprehensive about the growing power of the far right and Islamophobia in Germany. On the second day, I visited the Cologne Cathedral and learned about medieval history of the city and the formation of Gothic architecture. One fun fact that I learned was that there had been Christian worship places on the same grounds since the fourth century, when Cologne was under Roman control (the name Cologne comes from 'colony'). On the third and final day, I walked around Ehrenfeld, visited local shops, and tried to track down all of the (many!) churches in the area.



What was particularly fascinating about visiting at such a time was being able to witness the increasingly loud acceptance of diversity in Ehrenfeld at the very same time as— and actually in response to— the growing intolerance of other sections of German society. Many people in Cologne have sought to combine their cultural attachments to Christian symbolism and history, most notably represented through the Cologne Cathedral in the center of the city, with an active incorporation of non-Christian symbols, products, and discourses into city life. For example, for the first time ever, major grocery stores in Cologne such as Rewe began stocking “Ramadan calendars”. These calendars are modeled off of Christmas calendars, where each day reveals a new treat or gift. Products such as this remind us that religious diversity does not

always remain limited to self-contained and coexisting communities, but is rather an interactive phenomenon that often entails mutual exchange and development.

Another wonderful part about this trip was being able to visit the University of Cologne and consider options for graduate school. I was lucky enough to get access to library of the Institute of Languages and Cultures in the Islamic World. The library had an incredible collection, and the librarians were kind enough to photocopy (and even laminate!) dozens of pages of articles that I was unable to source elsewhere.

Information gained from this trip was deeply relevant to both my exam-based and coursework-based papers for my degree, and allowed me to experience in person many discussions that I had only witnessed in academic scholarship. The timing of my travels, during Ramadan and right after the elections, was an especially important and illuminating moment to visit, and I am very grateful for the generosity of Pembroke College and the Patrick Higgins travel grant.



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