

DEEP LISTENING: PRACTICING INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY IN GEOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK

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Abstract. The political and ethical quandaries of the “crisis of representation” that beset the social sciences from the 1980s on continue to reverberate in how geographers conduct their research today. Illustrated with two vignettes from my research in the UAE and Kazakhstan, this article explores the idea of “deep listening” as a methodological tack and mindset to guide geographic fieldwork, rooted in intellectual humility. Deep listening involves a critical reflexivity about our subject positions as researchers, as well as a suspicion of metanarratives that prevail in the media and academic debates, and a willingness to question our complicity in reproducing those narratives through our choice of research topics and methods. Deep listening is ultimately a way of practicing intellectual humility – which involves accepting that we could be incorrect at many levels, whether theoretical, factual, emotional, social, cultural, or political, and seeking out opportunities to change our mind.

Keywords: listening; qualitative methods; research ethics

Leaders across the Arabian Peninsula have recently begun promoting renewable energy and environmental sustainability through an impressive array of projects, large and small. Aiming to outstrip Dubai’s path-breaking 213-MW_p Al Maktoum Solar Park, in March 2018, Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman signed a \$200 billion deal with the Japanese investment giant SoftBank to create the world’s largest solar power project---with a projected peak generation capacity of 200 gigawatts. “It’s a huge step in human history. It’s bold, risky and we hope we succeed,” Prince Mohammed told the press (*Financial Times* 2018). The deal subsequently fell through, but sustainability is now enshrined in long-term development agendas across the Gulf, representing core pillars of the Qatar National Vision 2030, Saudi Vision 2030, and Vision 2021 in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and political and financial leaders are rapidly trying to bring these visions to life.

The flurry of activity geared toward “greening” the Gulf is part of my ongoing research, which began when I first traveled to the region in November 2012. A longtime friend had recently moved to Dubai to work for a major consulting company, after leaving his job with FirstSolar, a solar company headquartered in Tempe, Arizona. As it turned out, some of his former colleagues from FirstSolar were in Dubai during my visit. Their company was responsible for the first phase of the Al Maktoum Solar Park, which was the first major solar project in the Gulf and would be commissioned about a year later. I tagged along with my friend and his former colleagues, catching up over drinks in the lobby of a typically posh hotel near Dubai’s World Trade Center. Their insider shop-talk first seemed tangential to my research on urban development in the Gulf, but I listened intently to the twists and turns of their discussion about the difficulties of getting government clients across the Gulf states to invest in solar energy.

They spoke of manipulating rivalries among royal family members hunting for green credentials and international accolades, the importance of FirstSolar’s waterless PV cleaning system for its local sales pitch, and their anxieties about Chinese PV-cell manufacturers

undercutting Western firms. All told, they were cautiously optimistic about the future of solar in the Arabian Peninsula, though they knew it would always come down to an uncanny---and unpredictable---mixture of geopolitics, egos, finance, successful marketing, personal networks, engineering and technical development, and who knows what else. This conversation unfolded over just an hour, but I learned far more about sustainability politics in the Gulf states than I could ever hope to glean from academic treatises on the subject. These industry insiders were astute---if uniquely interested---observers of the Gulf's "greening," who already knew that the region was at a tipping point.

Judging from academic conversations today, by contrast, sustainability and the Gulf states do not mix. It is not only that they are not recognized as pioneers in environmental policy, but just the opposite: the Arabian Peninsula is typically understood as home to the world's most "guilty" individuals, states, and corporations in perpetuating traditional fuel economies and all the associated problems of climate change. The region is widely imagined as the global epicenter of hydrocarbon extraction. Gulf states are routinely stigmatized for their wasteful development patterns and reckless resource consumption (they have among the world's highest energy- and water-consumption rates per capita). In this discursive context, the sustainability projects mushrooming across the region are rarely taken seriously. Typically, they are just never discussed, but when they are, they are frequently dismissed as cases of "greenwashing" or public relations ploys (Koch 2018a).

Yet by fixating on how sustainable the Gulf's new environmental initiatives "really" are, these accounts miss some of the most important questions about how they fit within their local context and wider political networks, such as those I observed on my first trip to Dubai in 2012. I did not originally set out to examine these issues when I began working in the region, but it quickly became apparent that the changing geographies of the Arabian Peninsula---political, social, cultural, and natural---cannot be understood apart from its new push to develop renewable energy infrastructures and a diffuse array of sustainability initiatives. Being open to following this thread in analyzing Gulf urban development, I was forced to reconsider how I understood the region's political economy as unfalteringly tied to oil and gas. I remained open to changing my mind and am now focused on how sustainability is imagined and practiced in what Western observers still dismiss as "the most unlikely of places", by practicing a form of intellectual humility, which I have referred to elsewhere as "deep listening" (Koch 2016).

The concept of humility has a deep association with being meek, submissive, or somehow subordinating oneself. In geographic fieldwork, it is also frequently associated with practicing a kind of empathy for the viewpoints of marginalized subjects. Yet practicing humility is not an act of subordination, nor is the subaltern perspective its exclusive domain. Rather, being humble is simply the practice of being modest about one's ideas, opinions, and personal importance or rank. And one can be modest in interacting with those who are more *and* less powerful than we may be in a given moment. Intellectual humility was just as necessary for understanding the story of solar energy in the Gulf, populated primarily by "elite" characters, as it is for understanding the perspectives of the intensely marginalized individuals I have come to know in my fieldwork in Kazakhstan, and in particular in the rural hinterlands and villages surrounding the desiccated Aral Sea. I first traveled in 2005 to the Aral Sea region---a government-designated "ecological disaster zone"---where I struggled to make sense of the curious mix of fact, rumor, pride, and despair in local people's narratives about the sea's disappearance, their health, and their seemingly paradoxical support for their authoritarian and deeply corrupt government (see Koch 2006).

The environmental issues in the region are unquestionably rooted in the Soviet water and agricultural policies in Central Asia, but I wanted to understand how locals articulated the relationship between blame and responsibility for the contemporary state of affairs in independent Kazakhstan. Still today, residents in the region suffer from crushing poverty, diverse environmental hazards, lack of health care, and the overall exclusion from the benefits of the government's hydrocarbon-funded wealth, opulently put on display in its new capital city, Astana. In my 2005 interviews, many people did point to the Soviet policies as the reason for the region's ecological challenges, succinctly summarized by one woman: "Who is guilty? The political situation of that time is guilty." Some simply stated that they were unsure about the origins, but others suggested a wide range of sources. Various respondents drew from a long history of enmity with their southern neighbor, Uzbekistan, to suggest that the Uzbeks had taken Kazakhstan's water for themselves. "The people are to blame. Uzbekistan, it turns out, took our water for itself. There...they are to blame. Not ecology, but them. At the hands of these people our water disappeared," proclaimed one resident.

Yet others suggested that it was Baikonur Cosmodrome, the Russian-leased territory that launches all of Russia's space flights and rockets, as well as those of myriad other countries. Many local environmental problems in the Aral Sea region are related to dust storms that pick up toxic and salt-laden dust from the dried seabed and, though unrelated to the launches, they were nonetheless attributed to the site. "It's Baikonur, I think, that's responsible. It is operational, still. When they aren't launching rockets into space, our weather becomes a bit better," said one man. Another explained, "When Baikonur started launching rockets, there were problems with wind and dust. In the past, when the Sea was here and Baikonur was not here, the weather was very good." Although many people could name specific human activities impacting their local ecology, a third of twenty-five respondents explained that no one was guilty, but that it was simply God's will. This assertion was usually paired with the conclusion that there was no need to look to the government for help. For example, a woman in her early fifties explained, "I don't think that [we] need to turn to the government or our leaders. It all depends on God, if you will."

Some residents were similarly vehement that there was no point in seeking solutions from the government, although in contrast to the assertion that their woes resulted from God's will, these people represented a fringe set of vocal dissidents. Whereas most people were positive about the government's efforts to address local concerns, only a handful were openly critical. For example, various respondents explained that the government faced significant financial restrictions, but that officials assist "as they can." One fisherman, however, rejected the argument that the government's ability to help was dependent upon finances, saying: "The money is there, and you can just sit there and not do anything." Another respondent described her experience:

We have to fight this ourselves, yes? Because we need our children, but to our superiors—like our president—they don't really pay us any attention. We have to fight for this ourselves. [...] What our president is concerned with I, for instance, do not know. Sometimes medicine is bought. They say, 'So you live in an ecological [disaster] zone, get your medicine free by prescription.' But this is all bogus; there is no such thing.

Such oppositional views about the government were exceptionally rare among Aral Sea residents. Far more common was what one seventy-five--year-old fisherman told me about the country's autocratic president, who has been in power since 1991:

I trust in God that Nazarbayev is doing his best to improve the conditions of the people. People are getting their pensions on time, they are building houses in the villages. I don't know what the volume of the water will be, but I believe that the sea will be filled again. Now he is solving the problems with the unemployment, and the government is building houses in the villages for young teachers and doctors.

This narrative of overwhelming support was difficult for me to understand at the time and, as I wrote in my undergraduate thesis on this research, "It was incredibly striking to me that the locals could be so supportive of a man that claimed he was helping them as much as he could, but meanwhile using the nation's oil wealth to build himself several new palaces in Almaty" (Koch 2006, 76). But such faith in the president was pervasive and vehemently expressed in most corners of life in Aral, then and since. In listening deeply to the stories, aspirations, dreams, and reflections of Kazakhstanis for nearly fifteen years, I have come to understand many such expressions of support as sincerely felt; people may live in an authoritarian state where freedom of expression is limited in certain ways, but this does not make their affective attachment to their leader any less real. Trying to make sense of this perspective, of the marginalized subject who expresses support for a distant leader (who I personally understand to be a key source of that person's oppression) has driven me in all my studies in Kazakhstan and elsewhere since this research in 2005.

In authoritarian states, individuals who readily repeat the state-sanctioned rhetoric are typically dismissed by Western observers as brainwashed, dupes, or governed exclusively by fear of repression. Yet this liberal reading strips those individuals of agency, of the possibility of articulating their worldviews through terms other than the moralizing rhetoric that swirls in democratic states around free speech and choice. By listening deeply to the perspectives of Kazakhstan's most marginal citizens---who are just as likely to attribute their government's failure to address local ecological challenges to the will of God, their greedy neighbors, or a nearby cosmodrome---I have been forced to rethink those very categories of "free speech," "dissent," and "agency," which are so taken for granted in Western academia. It took me over a decade to feel that I had a modest grasp of the speech practices, life choices, emotional and personal commitments, and aspirations of these individuals, such that I could explain them on their own terms to the broader academic community in my recently-published book (Koch 2018b).

Brief as these examples from Kazakhstan and the UAE may be, I want to suggest that they are exemplary of the humility that imbues a practice of deep listening. Humility is nothing more than being modest about our own knowledge claims. In practicing geographic fieldwork today, the challenge rests in being willing to set aside our often hard-fought identities as "experts." As an ethic of openness, intellectual humility demands a critical reflexivity not just about our contextually-dependent subject positions as researchers, but also a suspicion of metanarratives that prevail in the media and academic debates. It also entails a willingness to question our complicity in reproducing those narratives through our choice of research topics and methods.

I consistently tell my students that what I love most about fieldwork---in places quite different from the United States and with individuals having backgrounds quite distinct from myself---is that *every single day I change my mind and often many times in the course of a day.*

Some issues may take longer to intellectually resolve than others, but listening deeply simply requires an openness to changing one's mind. And vice versa: being open to changing one's mind requires listening closely to what others are communicating. This demands no small degree of humility: changing one's mind is not easy and can sometimes be quite embarrassing (see Madsen 2015; Resnick 2019). But if we humbly question our own truth claims---consistently asking ourselves, "can it be that I am wrong?"---we might develop a habit of accepting that we could be incorrect at many levels, be they theoretical, factual, emotional, social, cultural, or political. Humility is rarely put on a pedestal in academia, dominated as it is by certain cults of expertise, but I believe it bears highlighting in examining how we are "doing" fieldwork today.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

In the 1980s and 1990s, many geographers were beset by an intense anxiety about representing Others and claiming any subject position of the "expert" observer who might know or uncover the truth. As poststructuralist, postmodernist, postcolonial, and feminist standpoints (among others) that aimed at destabilizing "objective" truth claims took root, geographers joined other social scientists in asserting and demonstrating that all knowing, all seeing, and all speaking is political, and that we can never be "floating eye" observers. These jointly epistemological and ontological arguments raised major methodological, not to mention ethical, challenges for those working with human subjects. Scholars have responded to the resulting "crisis of representation" in a number of ways, with some going so far as to reject all practices of speaking for others – what Linda Alcoff terms the "retreat" response – treating it as "arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate" (Alcoff 2001, 6).

Many geographers reject the extreme retreat response, but the prevailing disciplinary consensus is that all knowledge is situated and that we need to be careful about positioning ourselves and our participants in how we pursue our research. Indeed, reflexive listening has been one of the core themes in the vast literature on feminist methods, from the early 1990s to today (see especially, Anderson and Jack 1991; England 1994; Moss 2002; Hyams 2004; Staeheli and others 2004; Sharp 2005; Harcourt and Nelson 2015; Coddington 2017). Despite the tremendous insights to be gleaned from this literature, anxieties about representation continue to reverberate today: at our conferences, in our classrooms, our choice of research topics, the framing of our journal articles, in our advising meetings with graduate students. In responding to these anxieties, some geographers have suggested that we actually have a responsibility to speak, give voice, and otherwise represent others and their narratives. Linda McDowell (2010, 170), for example, has argued that, "As interviewers, we cannot and should not evade the academic and political responsibility of speaking for/on behalf of others through interpretations of the world that start, if not end, with the political interactions that take place in interviews and the ways in which we interpret these through the lens of our philosophical, theoretical and political frameworks" (see also Haraway 1988; Spivak 1988; Alcoff 2001).

Feminist and many other critical scholars have sought to put the tools of social science research in the service of social justice by "giving voice" to silenced views and "'listening' to subordinated others, groups variously categorized and marginalized by gender, sexuality, race, age, and so on" (Hyams 2004, 105). Yet how to listen and represent others remains a perennial challenge, especially as the power inequalities and cultural differences between researcher and respondent grow. These logistical issues are important in themselves, but the related methodology literature points to a common thread: that questions of speaking are inherently

linked with questions of listening. This notwithstanding, there is far less explicit reflection in this work on listening, which is the focus of this article.

I highlight listening because I believe that practicing humility and openness through dialogue with our research informants, partners, collaborators, and students requires listening closely and in diverse ways. Many of us are today surrounded by such “thin” listening that we rarely assess the breadth and depth of its scope. At different stages in the research cycle, the calendar year, and more broadly, in our careers, we are all able to listen and attend to research-related themes in multiple ways. We listen to our peers and students in the classroom, at conferences, in faculty meetings, and informal conversations throughout the day. We listen to our families and friends, the news media, our diverse entertainment and educational sources. Often---and perhaps most of the time---we are mere consumers of the spoken or written word, listening without the chance of speaking back. Sometimes we listen with great care or passion, and other times, passively, or even dismissively.

Given this diverse array of listening practices, how might geographers conceptualize deep listening as a research methodology or ethic? Is there something different about the listening we do on a day-to-day basis versus our focused listening “in the field” or related to our research topics? Scholars do not always ascribe an intellectual value to daily listening practices, but challenging this division between research-related and non-research-related listening may be a first step to promoting intellectual humility and deep listening. Unexpected insights come from unexpected corners: listening broadly, with empathy, and humility opens up the possibility of finding oneself in one such corner---just as I found in listening to both marginal *and* elite residents in Kazakhstan and the UAE. Listening in multiple ways, across multiple spatialities, temporalities, and communities may be one modest way to conceptualize the researcher’s ever-present challenge of working against the masculinist and imperialist impulses of extractivist research, and toward the realm of mutual understanding and surprise.

ENCOUNTERS AND ETHICS IN GEOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK

Geographic fieldwork is ultimately a series of encounters: with individuals, sites, materials, images, narratives, and so forth. Geographers are accustomed to analyzing how *context* influences the appropriateness of certain field methods, of respondent answers, or how a researcher is received and interpreted, etc. Focusing on *encounters*, by contrast, highlights how every research interaction is contingent. In describing “ethnographies of encounter,” Lieba Faier and Lisa Rofel (2014, 364) suggest that encounters “prompt unexpected responses and improvised actions, as well as long-term negotiations with unforeseen outcomes, including both violence and love.” Applied to geographic fieldwork, this approach forces scholars to reckon with the fact that we are never able to fully control, or even know, the ultimate effects of our practices and encounters in conducting research, which are and always will be “unintended” as much as they are “intended” (Sidaway 1992; Rose 1997; Alcoff 2001; Nelson 2013). Conceptualizing geographic fieldwork as a series of contingent encounters, rather than a variable methodological protocol to be undertaken in different places, also means that all research practices pose constantly shifting ethical questions and concerns. That is, if research consists of encounters all the way down, it is also a set of ethical quandaries all the way down.

Yet there is no formula for navigating the ethical issues that arise in the myriad aspects research and fieldwork. This is for the simple reason that every scholar has a unique positionality and must ultimately use their own ethical compass to conduct research responsibly and in good conscience. Extending well beyond institutional review board compliance, I have approached

these issues through a personal commitment to critical area studies research. While I believe that intellectual and ethical humility derives from being intimately familiar with a particular context, the ethic of openness I understand as listening deeply is more expansive than traditionally defined area studies concerns. Indeed, I first wrote of “deep listening” as a partly tongue-in-cheek reference to the anthropological joke about ethnography as “deep hanging out,” but one that arose out of recognition that not all scholars have the time or resources to go “somewhere else” or move with other social circles to do their research. With deepening internet connectivity around the world, scholars are now able to listen to voices and sounds, ideas and phenomena, often (but not always) far removed from our immediate location (Brandt 2017; Duggan 2017). So with a broader understanding of geographic fieldwork---as something that does not just happen “over there” with “other” people, but as an infinite and unpredictable series of encounters---listening deeply cannot be reduced fixed set of procedures; it is a mind-set just as much as it is an ethic.

At the most basic level, deep listening begins with a critical reflexivity, but one that goes beyond identifying and naming our personal positionality defined by a set of simple “externally defined categories” (Moser 2008, 385), such as identifying as white or female, to also encompass our investment in (re)producing particular academic narratives and our selves as particular kinds of academics. A reflexive form of deep listening thus demands an ethic of openness and humility that questions our role in challenging or upholding various popular or academic metanarratives, as well as attending to how geographic (spatial and temporal) context shapes all interactions we have in conducting our research, at “home” and in the “field” alike. Scholars are wont to desire boundaries between what “is” and “isn’t” related to our research because, otherwise, it becomes all-consuming. Social science research is almost invariably all-consuming, however, because no matter what boundaries we formally or informally conjure for ourselves, it is about observing, participating in, and cogitating on our social worlds. Rather than being inherently “problematic,” there is something liberating in acknowledging that we can never stop listening to what is going on around us. It is liberating in the sense that it eliminates the tremendous amount of labor that goes into producing and policing borders between what is and isn’t fieldwork, what is and isn’t within the scope of our research.

By refusing these borders and accepting openness, geographers as individuals and geography as a discipline might embrace what Tariq Jazeel and Colin McFarlane (2010) refer to as “responsible learning.” Akin to deep listening, responsible learning emphasizes uncertainty and challenging one’s intellectual, personal, and political limits:

In this context, we cannot anticipate research decisions or outputs, partly because we lack sufficient knowledge of different options which limits our ability to imagine other possible worlds, and partly because we cannot predict either what other voices might have to say or how those conversations might be managed. Uncertainty is a name for fora of collective learning. It is an intimidating prospect – to experiment, to let go, to try to unlearn habits of thought and practice – but whatever the limits it might place on responsible learning, it also, for us at least, promises an exciting and new set of possibilities. (Jazeel and McFarlane 2010, 120)

Uncertainty and “unlearning” implies, however, a base level of knowledge about one’s sphere of research. For this reason, deep listening requires a sustained commitment to research in particular places and with particular people. Without this, it can be difficult to “hear” beyond

traditional cognitive and interpretative frames and commonplace metanarratives about certain places or the trendy theoretical line of inquiry of the day (Koch 2016, 811). Embracing deeply contextual research opens up the possibility of novel research agendas beyond staid media narratives about certain people and places, and toward surprise and unlearning.

Conducting fieldwork is a key way to shift beyond the metanarratives that define academic “relevance” because it allows scholars to attend to both what is and is not said. This issue is a central concern for those working in the tradition of discourse analysis, and it has figured prominently in the feminist effort to look to silences for meaning (Anderson and Jack 1991). As Melissa Hyams (2004, 116) explains, if we refuse to valorize speech over silence, it is possible to hear “silence within voice,” which “can offer insights into the dynamic, relational, and hierarchical nature of knowledge construction and intersubjectivity, not least of which are insights into the binary construction of speaking over silence and its myriad social categorical associations.” And just as speech unfolds at many scales, so do silences. For example, in authoritarian states where free speech is actively suppressed, the general population is often forced to be silent on the plight of dissidents or even their mundane concerns. This has a wide effect within a country’s territory, which may or may not be transgressed through digital media. But silences unfold in myriad other spaces and interactions that researchers may or may not be privy to, such as in “closed contexts” (Koch 2013).

Silences can also be disciplinary, as all fields have their conformisms. It is not easy to identify disciplinary silences, especially when one is in the thick of it---whether “it” is graduate school, an academic subfield, one’s national context, local community, activist organization, political party, corporation, and so on. But paradoxically, to locate silences and promising new research directions in our fields, we need to master the relevant metanarratives. This is the perennial challenge for graduate students who are preparing for comprehensive exams. The logic of these exams, though, is that this sort of regimented mastery of a subfield will allow students to identify the shortcomings of their chosen fields and to then pair this with their subsequent fieldwork. This process is precisely why “empirically-grounded” fieldwork (whatever form that takes) is so important: without developing a depth of knowledge in a specific sphere (defined thematically, spatially, socially, or all of the above), it can otherwise be impossible to identify the silences that hegemonic discourse crowds out of view. Working with students to practice intellectual humility is thus essential for maintaining the openness that is needed to simultaneously understand and be skeptical of metanarratives and seek to change their mind through empirical research.

<<A-HEAD>> PRACTICING DEEP LISTENING

Deep listening, I want to suggest, is a productive way to conceptualize an ethic of openness and intellectual humility in geographic research, and to resist the widespread academic proclivity for mastery and immunity from criticism (Alcoff 2001, 22). Of course, it is easy to profess a commitment to being open to surprise, new ideas, and challenging one’s preconceived notions. It is much harder to put this into practice and harder still to offer others recommendations. Nonetheless, I would like to close with three reflections on actually practicing deep listening. Flawed and incomplete as they may be, these practices are what I most aspire to in doing fieldwork today:

1. *Practice empathy.* Empathy is often equated with *sympathizing* with the other perspective, but it actually means trying to see the world from another person’s perspective, cognitively, emotively, or otherwise. Because empathy is defined around bridging some kind of

distance, it is most relevant for understanding “the perspectives of those with whom we have less in common, or with whom we disagree on fundamental issues” (Walsh 2018, 227). In my research in the post-Soviet space, for example, I will never agree with those who tell me that Stalin was a good man because his iron-fisted rule made the Soviet Union strong and respected. But practicing empathy in the course of these conversations has helped me to locate the tropes, emotions, and il/logics that have led certain respondents to mobilize this narrative. Listening to these individuals with empathy, but not necessarily sympathy, has helped me understand the complex subjectivities of citizens in the authoritarian states of the former USSR and to move beyond stock narratives in the West that cast Stalin as evil and his followers as crazy, and toward a fuller understanding of authoritarian governmentalities.

2. *Listen deliberately.* It is increasingly rare for scholars, just as with any other ordinary people, to listen deliberately in our daily lives. Various media forms are designed to splinter our attention and, in turn, promote the kind of “thin” listening I noted above. Each of us may find a way to resist this, such as simply not engaging with certain platforms, confining our digital lives to certain hours of the day, or taking a more proactive approach to carve out time to let one’s mind wander and promote spontaneous listening and thinking. For me, this means spending a good deal of time riding my bicycle every week, where my thoughts simmer and take shape, but also spending time with friends who are in different professions or fields, such as the friend I described at the outset of the paper and whose collegial banter helped me to see energy politics in the Gulf quite differently than I had anticipated on my first trip to the region. Resisting academic conformism also suggests the need to continually ask questions about liminal cases, actively seeking out situations, examples, or other cases that do not fit our expectations or collapse the foundations of our established theories, such as with the essentialist understanding of the brainwashed citizen of the authoritarian state in Kazakhstan. Here is where humility is again essential: it is not easy to accept that we are wrong. By deliberately valuing---and indeed, seeking out---opportunities to be proven wrong, we are in a better position to listen beyond the prevailing metanarratives.

3. *Refuse the border policing of what “is” and “isn’t” research.* Intellectual humility comes from being as open to new ideas as possible, and learning to embrace the awkwardness of being proven wrong. But we first must be exposed to new ideas---itself a task that requires expanding our listening practices into realms that may themselves be unfamiliar, uncertain, and uncomfortable. For some, this may mean traveling far from home, but it need not be so dramatic: it could simply begin with resisting the urge to police the boundaries between what “is” and “isn’t” research. For me, this means reading broadly, especially in related fields like anthropology and history, but also in literary theory and linguistics, or even novels, poetry, or popular news outlets and podcasts. In my writing on spectacle, for example, I initially came to understand its power as synecdoche through conversations with a close friend who is a poet. While I recognize that my own research interests are rather eclectic, the ethic of humility and openness of deep listening means keeping our ears open to new ideas or from fields or sources outside our defined research topic, as insights so frequently come through chance encounters and unexpected corners. This is why I always tell my students that I love fieldwork because it involves changing my mind every day. I say this with great passion because I do indeed revel in changing my mind and want others to see it in a positive light as well. Indeed, I believe all geographers will benefit from committing to listen deeply, humbly, deliberately, and with empathy.

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