

I don't know when plastic became most of what we have.

I know plastic has been around for a while, but our collective human stuff didn't seem to become plastic until sometime around that scene in *The Graduate* when Dustin Hoffman gets told that plastics are the future.

It would be too anachronistic to think of some tedious red trinket in a concentration camp in Poland. The flat, bright, and everlasting colors littering our existence don't even fit in a sentence about the Holocaust.

In an act of mass produced absolution our toothbrushes, combs, ink pens, and watches have evolved to give us some distance from that genocide. Everything in the pictures is old and looks like brass, glass, or wood, and the reality of a human race that would allow genocide to occur feels just as by-gone.

Walking through the first few memorials didn't allow for incidental indicators of distance from killing. There was no privilege to think that the clothes and objects were from a time that we don't have to relate to.

The style of clothes reminded me of shopping for school when I was a kid. The graphics on t-shirts had characters from TV shows I watched. The rosaries were plastic mold injected beads like the ones they would give us on Wednesday night CCD classes. The watch lying in a heap of personal effects was the same as the one I was using as an alarm back in my hotel room.

The Nyamata Genocide Memorial was jarring for the number of human remains resting below the church. The Ntarama Memorial was difficult for the detail about how buildings were deliberately collapsed on people who thought they'd found a safe place at the church. The National Memorial in Kigali was humbling, because it was so carefully curated in a country where form always followed function.

But Nyamata was haunting because the clothes and pocket contents of the victims were carefully stacked on the pews. Every bit of surface was covered with a six inch bundle of clothes like everyone who'd been sitting there just disappeared and left their clothes to collapse neatly into their seats.

Ntarama was haunting because the storage shed behind the "proper" memorial was a twenty yard hallway of clothes hanging from a bar just high enough to feel like they were leaning over you. It was packed so closely that to even turn around and walk out was to brush against a shirt like it was someone who can't get out of your way in a crowded subway.

The National Memorial was haunting because all of the almost-the-same was finally assembled the way it would be in an American museum. And what was assembled was often as American as the plastic picnic plates of childhood.

The clothes were normal. The photos of newscasters and politicians were recognizable. The quality of the photographs were like family pictures taken at my grandparents' house. Everything was something I knew, and I no longer had the option of seeing genocide as something "other" when it was all ordinary.

We are selfish with our emotional reservoir. The statistics and the stories are allowed to be real, but not to you. The fact that you have to travel halfway around the world to really learn about it means you're insulated from it. It's exotic and without inherency in your life. But then it gets familiar and you aren't allowed to look at it

clinically, because it isn't academic anymore. It's the person behind you walking out of a building full of clothes because she saw a shirt her husband wore regularly. It's finally as human as it always should have been.

That all felt like enough while I was there. Then I got home and the news had little snippets about Myanmar and a Canadian newspaper said that the events looked a lot like ethnic cleansing. The precise, carefully vague language could be an ABC special report from April 1994.

The west is once again making sure we don't have to admit any responsibility in the face of unthinkable human behavior. In the age of the "all lives matter" debate, just far enough removed from remembering Clinton's vow of "never again" to the world, I sit and wonder what people will find later. Will it be the plastic case of a cellphone they remember getting in middle school? Will it be something as perfectly ephemeral as a fidget spinner- immediately forgettable as an idea but endlessly present as a piece of plastic?

What will we find in the mass graves of Myanmar?

Or what can the average person do this time to make sure there isn't a next time?