

News of disappeared Indigenous children is a horror. The fact that teachers committed these crimes makes matters worse.

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Even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious. So wrote the great Jewish-German teacher, Walter Benjamin, on the brink of his death fleeing his Nazi persecutors in 1940.

The discovery of the bodies of 215 Indigenous children abandoned in unmarked graves at a former residential school in Kamloops brings the importance of Benjamin's chilling words vividly to life. I refuse to say that these little ones were "buried" because that would mean denying precisely what the children were denied, namely a respectful internment, one honouring the wishes and practices of their families and communities. The ghostly radar images of their underground remains are like the photo-negative of a happily confederated and peaceful Canada. They tell an entirely different story of the country, one whose violent and violating end is nowhere in sight. It comes as no surprise to many that ours is a topography of terror and a land of *los desaparecidos*, the disappeared. As long as there are unmarked graves of Indigenous children, the enemy has not ceased to be victorious. And in too many cases, the enemy is "us"—a Canada indifferent to the unique strengths, histories, and aspirations of Indigenous peoples and to the systematic forms of oppression that they are made to endure.

As a white Canadian reading news of the unburied Indigenous children, I am sickened by the racist depravity of the settler culture from which I have otherwise derived so much. But as a long-time educator of youth, I cannot but be appalled that students were forced to endure their destruction in the name of education, at the hands of teachers, and in a place that insolently called itself a "school." But how different are my own classrooms? I have a great deal of work to do answering that question. What I do know is that the residential schools cast a dark shadow on all of us who claim to be teachers.

What forms of violence are so murderous, so over-going, so full of rage, and so anxiously fearful that the deaths of Indigenous children wasn't sufficiently harmful? Why desecrate their mortal remains too? To deny the dead a proper burial is to commit an act of wounding viciousness that is recognized across cultures and throughout history to be an unforgiveable atrocity. It profanes the very idea of being human.

But it gets worse. The terrible truth is that before these children were cast off like so much refuse, the residential schools were already a kind of unmarked grave. These institutions were, in full view of Canadians, purpose-built to "kill the Indian." Anything left over from this deadly education was merely the detritus of the engine of Confederation. By unceremoniously leaving the remains of the children in the ground, the schools--and the culture that created them--murdered them again.

To those residential school teachers, and to the institutions that authorized them, I have things to say.

Teacher, you desecrated Indigenous youth in your contemptible classrooms and dormitories . . . and then you took one more obscene step and chose to mar their corpses. Killing them or letting them die was not enough for you. Teacher, when you left them, the little ones, unattended, you arrogantly decreed that these children were unworthy of being grieved. Teacher, in disappearing the children you

extinguished ways of life about which you never cared to know anything except that they threatened your confidence that this land was your land. The children for whom you were responsible were unsafe in your hands when they were in school. And they were not safe after you left them to die either. Teacher, you killed the Indigenous children and defiled their remains, but you also tried to murder their memory. You committed a crime and then sought to erase all the evidence. You—and so many collaborators across this country—watched what happened but failed to bear witness to those losses.

Teacher, listen to me: only white murderers believe that the Indigenous dead are relegated to nothingness. Only white murderers think that Indigenous children are ungrievable. You abandoned those children, mistakenly counting on no one noticing. But you missed something important: the opposite of forgetfulness is not remembrance but justice. Despite your brutalizing and loveless idea of education, every Indigenous child matters. Every Indigenous child in your school called herself beloved; each child felt herself beloved on the Earth.