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# Structural Violence and Social Ignorance in *Grave of the Fireflies*

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**ABSTRACT**
This study discusses structural violence and social ignorance in Isao Takahata's film *Grave of the Fireflies*, released in Japan in 1988. This analysis explains the structural violence and social ignorance experienced by the main characters Seita and Setsuko during the war in Kobe. Seita and Setsuko are victims of the war, and the state's failure to protect them, coupled with the apathy of society, makes their situation particularly distressing. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method, as the process and results are described in a descriptive manner. The researcher utilizes Johan Galtung's theory of structural violence and Emile Durkheim's theory of social ignorance. The results of the study show that the film script depicts structural violence through the inability of the state and social institutions to guarantee the basic rights of civilians, such as: mother's death, loss of access to education, starvation and homelessness. Additionally, the phenomenon of social ignorance is reflected in the attitudes of society, such as: aunt's ignorance, the civil authorities' ignorance, society's ignorance and Setsuko's death.

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## 1. Introduction

Literature is a form of human expression that represents thoughts, feelings, experiences, and social realities through language. Literature provides insights into society and allows social issues within particular historical and cultural contexts to be represented and critically examined (Faruk, 2015).

Literary works encompass various forms, including novels, poetry, short stories, drama, and films. Although film is primarily an audiovisual medium, it can also be analyzed as a narrative work because it contains literary elements such as characters, plot, setting, conflict, and theme. Effendy (1993) views film as a cultural product and a medium for artistic expression, while Bordwell and Thompson (2010) emphasize that films have narrative structures comparable to prose fiction. Therefore, film can be studied as both an audiovisual work and a representation of social and human experiences.

One film that strongly represents social suffering in the context of war is *Grave of the Fireflies*, a Japanese animated film directed by Isao Takahata and produced by Studio Ghibli, first released in 1988. The film was adapted from Akiyuki Nosaka's semi-autobiographical short story of the same title, originally published in 1967. The story reflects Nosaka's experiences during World War II, particularly the loss and suffering he experienced during the bombing of Kobe. Through the experiences of two siblings, Seita and Setsuko, the film portrays the devastating consequences of war not only in terms of physical destruction and loss of life but also in terms of hunger, displacement, social exclusion, and the failure of surrounding social structures to protect vulnerable individuals.

The experiences of Seita and Setsuko can be examined through the concepts of structural violence and social ignorance. Structural violence refers to harm caused by social,

economic, political, or institutional conditions that limit individuals' access to basic needs and a dignified life. In *Grave of the Fireflies*, the consequences of war are reflected in their experiences of hunger, homelessness, deprivation, and limited access to basic necessities. Their suffering therefore results not only from individual circumstances but also from the broader social conditions created by war.

In addition to structural violence, *Grave of the Fireflies* portrays social ignorance toward vulnerable individuals. Seita and Setsuko experience indifference from those around them, particularly their aunt, who criticizes Seita for not working and considers Setsuko a burden. As a result, they leave her home and live in an abandoned shelter. Their struggles, including Setsuko's malnutrition and Seita's difficulty obtaining food, demonstrate how the lack of social support, empathy, and collective responsibility can worsen the suffering of war victims.

The experiences of Seita and Setsuko show that the effects of war extend beyond physical destruction. War disrupts social structures, access to food and healthcare, family relationships, and education, leaving vulnerable individuals unable to meet their basic needs. Prolonged crisis may also weaken social empathy and collective responsibility, causing the suffering of others to be overlooked. Through the experiences of its main characters, *Grave of the Fireflies* critically portrays how structural conditions and social responses contribute to human suffering.

Although *Grave of the Fireflies* has been widely discussed in relation to war, childhood, trauma, loss, and anti-war themes, its representation of structural violence and social ignorance offers a significant perspective on the social dimensions of war. The suffering of Seita and Setsuko is not only a personal tragedy but also reflects the failure of social structures to protect vulnerable individuals and the indifference of others toward their suffering. Examining these aspects provides a deeper understanding of how war-related conditions and social responses contribute to human suffering.

Therefore, this study focuses on the forms of structural violence and social ignorance represented in *Grave of the Fireflies*. The analysis particularly examines the experiences of Seita and Setsuko in relation to deprivation, loss, homelessness, hunger, and the lack of social support during wartime. The study aims to identify and analyze the forms of structural violence experienced by Seita and Setsuko and to examine the forms of social ignorance represented through the actions or inaction of people and social institutions surrounding them. By analyzing these representations, the study seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of the relationship between war, social structures, vulnerability, and human suffering as represented in literary and cinematic works.

## 2. Literature Review

Sociology of literature is an interdisciplinary approach that examines the relationship between literary works and the social realities in which they are produced. Faruk (2015) states that sociology of literature explores the connection between human creations and their surrounding social reality. Literary works are closely related to social and cultural contexts, reflecting the values, norms, and ways of life of society. Thus, literature can serve as a representation of social life and provide insights into human relationships and social conditions.

Ratna (2013) explains that sociology of literature examines the relationship between literary works and the social values and norms of society. It considers both the intrinsic elements of literary works and the social and cultural conditions reflected in them. Similarly, Endaswara (2013) emphasizes that social reality is an important basis of literary creation, while authors remain free to express their perspectives and experiences through their works.

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Al-Ma'ruf and Nugrahani (2019) explain that sociology of literature examines social aspects represented in literary works to understand broader social phenomena. Similarly, Tyas (2018) emphasizes the social elements underlying literary works, particularly the shared concern of literature and sociology with human life in society. Susanto (2016) adds that literary works can represent social realities and provide insights into the lives of particular communities. Therefore, sociology of literature provides a relevant framework for analyzing *Grave of the Fireflies*, particularly its representation of human suffering, social relationships, and the social consequences of war.

Film is not only a form of entertainment but also a medium for representing social realities and human experiences. Animated films combine visual, narrative, and artistic elements to construct meaning and convey social messages. Wells (1998) explains that animation is a distinctive art form that allows filmmakers to construct imaginative worlds beyond physical reality. Therefore, animation can effectively represent complex themes and social issues through visual storytelling.

The development of animation has progressed significantly from early forms of moving-image technology to contemporary digital animation. Daniati, Mulyadi, and Nugroho (2023) divide the development of animation into several periods, including the Silent Era, the Golden Age of Animation, the Television Animation Era, and the Modern Animation Era. Japanese animation has become particularly significant in the development of animated film and has gained international recognition. Studio Ghibli, established by Hayao Miyazaki and his collaborators, has produced a number of internationally recognized animated films, including *Grave of the Fireflies*.

Although animated films are often associated with children, they can address complex social issues and human experiences. Napier (2001) argues that animation can engage audiences with contemporary social realities through characters, visual elements, and conflicts. In addition, Bordwell and Thompson (2010) emphasize that color, composition, movement, and other visual elements contribute to a film's narrative and emotional meaning. Therefore, animated films provide an effective medium for representing social issues and human suffering.

The concept of structural violence was introduced by Johan Galtung in his discussion of violence, peace, and peace research. Galtung (1969) conceptualizes violence in terms of the gap between what is potentially possible for individuals and their actual conditions. Structural violence occurs when social structures create conditions that prevent individuals from achieving their potential or fulfilling their basic needs. Unlike direct physical violence, structural violence operates indirectly through social, political, and economic structures.

Galtung (1969) explains that violence can be embedded within structures through unequal power and unequal distribution of opportunities and resources. As a result, certain groups or individuals may experience poverty, deprivation, inequality, and limited access to essential resources. Structural violence may therefore produce serious consequences, including illness, suffering, and premature death, even when there is no identifiable individual directly committing physical violence.

Michalowski (2010) extends the discussion of structural violence by relating it to social harm and the role of institutions. Structural violence may involve injuries, illnesses, and deaths resulting from avoidable conditions such as poverty, inequality, unsafe environments, and social exclusion. It may also involve the loss of health, economic resources, autonomy, and other fundamental aspects of human well-being. This perspective is particularly relevant to the analysis of children affected by war because their vulnerability may be intensified by the failure of social and political structures to provide adequate protection.

In the context of *Grave of the Fireflies*, Galtung's theory provides a framework for examining the suffering experienced by Seita and Setsuko beyond direct interpersonal violence. Hunger, homelessness, deprivation, and the loss of access to basic necessities can be understood in relation to the broader social conditions created by war. Thus, structural violence in this study refers to forms of suffering resulting from conditions and structures that restrict the characters' ability to meet their basic needs and live safely.

Social ignorance concerns situations in which individuals or groups fail to respond to social problems or the suffering of others despite having an opportunity or capacity to act. Gross and McGoey (2015) explain that ignorance is not necessarily caused by a simple absence of knowledge. It can also be produced and maintained by social, cultural, and structural conditions. Social norms, group pressure, uncertainty, and limited information may influence individuals' decisions to ignore situations requiring attention.

Gross and McGoey (2015) explain that ignorance may occur when individuals avoid addressing problems due to uncertainty, fear of consequences, or the belief that their actions will have little impact. When responsibility is shared among several individuals, it may become diffused, as reflected in the *bystander effect*. Thus, social ignorance can contribute to the neglect of injustice, discrimination, human suffering, and human rights violations.

Durkheim (1897) explains that individual behavior is influenced by social facts, including norms, customs, and collective values. When social integration and norms weaken, individuals may experience *anomie*, characterized by reduced social connection and responsibility. From this perspective, social ignorance is not merely an individual attitude but may also reflect broader social conditions that influence individual behavior.

In *Grave of the Fireflies*, social ignorance is reflected in the inadequate assistance and emotional support received by Seita and Setsuko. Their aunt’s treatment, limited access to assistance, and the lack of adequate response to Setsuko’s deteriorating condition illustrate the neglect of vulnerable individuals. Therefore, social ignorance in this study refers to the failure or unwillingness of individuals or social groups to adequately respond to the suffering and needs of Seita and Setsuko.

Several previous studies have examined *Grave of the Fireflies* and the representation of violence and social suffering. Akimoto (2014), in *Peace Education through the Animated Film Grave of the Fireflies: Physical, Psychological, and Structural Violence of War*, examines the physical, psychological, and structural violence experienced by Seita and Setsuko using Johan Galtung’s typology of violence. The study highlights structural violence as the denial of basic rights, including socioeconomic welfare, education, housing, and employment. These findings demonstrate the relevance of Galtung’s theory for analyzing war-related suffering in *Grave of the Fireflies*.

Fadilah et al. (2021), in *Potential for Peacebuilding in Conflict and Violence in Sri Lanka Based on the Thoughts of Johan Galtung*, employ a qualitative literature-study approach to examine conflict and violence in Sri Lanka through Galtung's ideas. The study demonstrates that Galtung's concepts of conflict and violence can be applied to the analysis of social problems arising from conflict situations.

Another relevant study by Derry Ismail Ahmad examines changes in the mindset and behavior of child characters in Isao Takahata’s *Hotaru no Haka* (*Grave of the Fireflies*) using a descriptive qualitative approach. The study explores how the war environment affects Seita and Setsuko, including the neglect they experience from people around them, particularly their aunt. It shows that wartime pressures significantly influence the children’s behavior and experiences compared with those of children living in normal conditions.

Previous studies provide an important foundation for this research. Akimoto (2014) focuses on physical, psychological, and structural violence, while other studies examine

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structural violence in different literary and social contexts. However, this study specifically examines the relationship between structural violence and social ignorance in *Grave of the Fireflies*. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, it analyzes the film's narrative and dialogue to identify how structural conditions and social responses contribute to the suffering experienced by Seita and Setsuko.

## 3. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to analyze the forms of structural violence and social ignorance experienced by Seita and Setsuko in the animated film *Grave of the Fireflies*. A research design provides a systematic framework for addressing research questions through appropriate data collection and analysis procedures. Creswell (2018) describes research design as a plan that guides the processes of data collection and analysis.

Research designs are commonly classified into qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach because the data consisted of words, sentences, dialogues, monologues, and narrative events from the film script. This approach was used to describe and interpret the phenomena represented in the film. Sukmadinata (2011) explains that descriptive qualitative research aims to describe phenomena by examining their characteristics, qualities, and relationships.

The primary source of data in this study was the script of the animated film *Grave of the Fireflies*, directed by Isao Takahata. The data consisted of relevant words, sentences, dialogues, monologues, and narrative events that represented structural violence and social ignorance experienced by Seita and Setsuko.

Data were collected through documentation and close reading of the *Grave of the Fireflies* film script. The researcher repeatedly examined the script to understand the storyline, conflicts, and experiences of the main characters. Relevant dialogues, monologues, sentences, and other textual elements were identified, recorded, and organized according to the research questions. The data were then verified for relevance and consistency. Finally, the collected data were analyzed descriptively using the concepts of structural violence and social ignorance to identify how these forms of suffering are represented through the experiences of Seita and Setsuko.

The data analysis was conducted in three stages. First, relevant data concerning the effects of war on Seita and Setsuko were identified and classified according to structural violence and social ignorance. Second, the classified data were analyzed by relating textual evidence from the film script to the theoretical framework and research questions. Third, the data were interpreted descriptively to explain how war-related suffering is represented through the experiences, conflicts, and social conditions of the two main characters.

## 4. Discussion

This analysis includes two parts described in the scope of the study, namely structural violence and social ignorance. The structural violence consists of: mother's death, loss of access to education, starvation, and homelessness. The social ignorance consists of: the aunt's ignorance, civil authorities' ignorance, society's ignorance, and Setsuko's death.

### 4.1 Structural Violence

Structural violence is a form of indirect violence embedded in social, political, and economic structures. It occurs when institutions or systems create conditions that disadvantage individuals and prevent them from meeting their basic needs. In the animated film *Grave of the Fireflies*, structural violence profoundly affects Seita and Setsuko,

particularly through the consequences of war, including the loss of their home, limited access to food and healthcare, and the death of their mother.

### 4.1.1 *Mother's Death*

The death of Seita and Setsuko's mother represents a profound loss and can be examined as a manifestation of structural violence from Johan Galtung's perspective. Structural violence occurs when social systems fail to fulfill basic needs, causing suffering without a direct perpetrator. In the film, the mother's death results not only from the bombing but also reflects inadequate wartime protection and access to medical care. Thus, her death illustrates how systemic conditions can contribute to suffering and undermine basic rights to safety, protection, and healthcare.

> (Seita is putting food items into the hole he dug as the air raid sirens sound. His mother is trying to put a protective cap on Setsuko.) Voice: Take shelter! Take shelter! Please take shelter! Voices: [?][?] If it's a bombing raid then the shelter-hole behind the fire house is the safest. [?] Setsuko: It's hot! Mother: You're a good girl, aren't you? You must bear it. [ALT: You must endure it.] (Setsuko squirms away.) Well, I'll be going to the air-raid shelter. You two be careful and join me soon. Sett-chan [in reference to Setsuko], you listen to your brother. Seita: Mom, never mind. You gotta go quickly! Mother: Yes, yes. Seita: Mom, do you have the medicines with you? Mother: Yes, yes. I have them. Setsuko: I don't like the air-raid shelter... Seita: Saying such a silly thing... [ALT (poor): What a silly thing to say.] You could be blown up by the bombs. [ALT: Don't blame me if you get blown up by a bomb.] Hurry and get on! Setsuko: The dolly! [ALT: My dolly!] Seita: Where? Ah! (1992: 3)

The death of Seita and Setsuko's mother was caused by severe burns sustained during an airstrike. Her death reflects structural violence, which occurs when social systems and structures fail to fulfill individuals' basic needs, resulting in injustice and suffering. In this case, her death can be understood as a consequence of the failure of social and political systems to adequately protect civilians from the effects of war.

> (Another day. The body of Seita and Setsuko's mother is being carried out for cremation.) Man 1: We can't take off the bandage. It's better not to look at the body. 1: We have to use trucks starting today. 2: Your sister... What did you do with her? 3: I left her with our distant relative in Nishinomiya. We had arrangements for us to stay there in case we got burned out <of our home>. 4: Is that so? That's good. Well, I have duties, so I'll leave you here. Take care. [LT: Be well.] (1992: 5-6)

Following the airstrikes, there was no meaningful protection or assistance from the government or social institutions for Seita and Setsuko's family. This situation reflects the failure of social structures to support civilians affected by war, particularly vulnerable children. The absence of adequate protection mechanisms left Seita and Setsuko without sufficient support, illustrating how institutional failure can contribute to structural violence during wartime.

> Seita: Mom died at the school. Aunt: What? She died? If that was the case, why didn't you tell me sooner? You're an unfrank child! ["Mizukusai" = not being frank out of reservation or from politeness] Seita: I didn't want Setsuko to know. Aunt: So she died...my goodness. You must write to your father and let him know. (1992: 6-7)

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The aunt's response to Seita's mother's death shows a lack of empathy and emotional support. Rather than comforting Seita and Setsuko, she focuses on the delay in informing her and criticizes Seita for not communicating. This situation reflects Galtung's concept of structural violence, in which unequal social structures contribute to the unequal distribution of resources and create suffering among vulnerable groups.

### 4.1.2 Loss of Access to Education

After the airstrike destroyed their home and caused their mother's death, Seita and Setsuko faced severe economic hardship and focused primarily on survival. As a result, they lost access to education and were unable to continue attending school. This situation reflects structural violence because wartime social and economic conditions limited access to essential services, including education. The lack of institutional support for children affected by war further demonstrates the failure of social structures to protect their basic rights and needs.

> Man: Everyone! Please gather at the school! [LT: People's School, Citizen's School] Seita: What's the matter? Setsuko: My eyes hurt. Seita: You mustn't rub them. They'll be able to wash them at the school. Setsuko: Where's Mom? Seita: She's at the school. Setsuko: School? Seita: Yeah. Let's hurry over there. Setsuko: Okay. (At the school, a make-shift hospital has been set up.) (1992: 4)

In this scene, schools function as shelters and evacuation centers rather than places of learning during airstrikes. Consequently, children lose access to education, reflecting the disruption of essential services and the failure to provide adequate educational and protective environments during wartime. The absence of alternative learning facilities further illustrates the neglect of children's educational rights under conditions of structural violence.

### 4.1.3 Starvation

The film depicts the severe starvation experienced by Seita and Setsuko after the loss of their mother. With limited family and community support, they struggle to obtain sufficient food, leading to Setsuko's malnutrition, physical weakness, and eventual death. This condition reflects structural violence because wartime social and economic structures disrupted access to food and other basic resources. Although Seita attempts to provide for his sister, his efforts are insufficient to protect her from starvation. Thus, the film shows that war causes not only direct physical destruction but also structural conditions that threaten civilians' basic needs, health, and survival.

> Seita: Sorry! [LT: Forgive me!] I had to wait a long time. What's the matter? Setsuko: I'm hungry. I'm thirsty. Seita: All right. (ALT: Understood) Here. Lick these <candy> drops. Mom had seven thousand yen saved in the bank. Seven thousand yen! If there's that much, we can manage plenty. There's no need to worry anymore. (Setsuko is crying in the street, expressing her hunger. Her crying ceases temporarily when Seita hands over the candy can, but resumes when she finds no candy drops. Seita hits the can and several candy pieces that were stuck to the bottom of the can are found. Setsuko looks at what she has left, and after some thought, eats the smallest and puts the rest back into the can. Seita gives the can to Setsuko for her to keep.) (1992: 11-12)

This scene depicts the hunger experienced by Seita and Setsuko. Setsuko's statement, "I'm hungry. I'm thirsty," reflects their unmet basic needs during wartime. Although Seita

tries to comfort her with candy and reassurance about their mother's savings, financial resources cannot overcome the severe food scarcity caused by the war. Their inability to obtain sufficient food illustrates how wartime conditions disrupted access to basic necessities and contributed to structural violence against civilians.

> (A farmer is cutting an ice block for delivery. Seita, standing by, picks the ice scraps and feeds them to Setsuko after the man leaves.) Seita: I'm so hungry... [ALT: I'm so starved...] What do you want to eat? Setsuko: Tempura, and Otsukuri, and Tokoro-ten... [ET: Tempura, and Sashimi, and Sour Jelly] Seita: Anything more? Setsuko: Ice cream...And I want to eat drops again. (1992: 18)

The scene in which Seita takes ice shavings from a farmer for Setsuko illustrates the severity of their food deprivation. Their limited access to food and water reflects the failure of social structures to meet their basic needs. Their conversation about foods such as tempura, sashimi, tokoroten, and ice cream also reveals the psychological effects of prolonged hunger, as these imagined foods represent both their desire for nourishment and their longing for normal life before the war. Thus, the scene demonstrates how structural violence affects both physical and psychological well-being through prolonged deprivation.

### 4.1.4 Homelessness

The air raid destroys Seita and Setsuko's home, leaving them without safe and adequate shelter. Their displacement is worsened by the lack of sufficient assistance or alternative housing. This situation reflects the weakness of social protection during wartime and constitutes structural violence, as social structures fail to meet their basic need for safe housing.

> (Rain starts to fall.) Seita: So this <rain> is what they say falls after air-raids... (Seita, carrying Setsuko on his back, climbs up to a road.) Seita: My, it's become really...cleared...Look, that's Kohkaido. We went there to eat zo-sui, remember? (zo-sui= soup-like rice dish) Setsuko: Did our home burn down? Seita: Looks that way. Setsuko: What will we do? Seita: Dad will take revenge for us. (1992: 4)

This scene illustrates the devastating impact of war through the destruction of Seita and Setsuko's home. After the air raid, Seita carries Setsuko through the charred remains of the city, while their brief conversation confirms the loss of their home. This destruction represents not only the loss of shelter but also the loss of safety, protection, and family security, leaving them vulnerable to displacement and further hardship.

> (Recalling,) (Seita comes to the shelter-hole. As they wait out the raid in the shelter,) Setsuko: I want to go home. I don't want to stay at aunt anymore. Seita: The house got burnt. We can't go home anymore. (1992: 13)

This scene represents the painful reality of losing Seita and Setsuko's home as a direct consequence of the war. While taking shelter from air raids, Setsuko expresses her desire to return home and her discomfort with staying at her aunt's house. Seita's statement, "The house got burnt. We can't go home anymore," confirms that their home has been destroyed and is no longer habitable. This situation illustrates how war deprives civilians of basic shelter and leaves vulnerable children without a secure place to live.

> (They come to the cave. Setsuko is thoroughly enjoying herself.) Setsuko: Here's the kitchen! Here's the front door! Where's the toilet? Seita: It doesn't matter where. <Because> I'll be going with you. (1992: 13)

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After losing their home, Seita and Setsuko are forced to live in an empty cave that provides inadequate shelter. The dark and uncomfortable conditions intensify their physical and psychological suffering, reflecting the vulnerability of civilians who lack safe housing during wartime. This situation illustrates structural violence through the failure of social structures to provide adequate protection, shelter, and basic well-being for vulnerable children.

### 4.2 Social Ignorance

Social ignorance refers to a situation in which individuals or groups fail to respond to others who need assistance, even when they have the capacity to help. In wartime, economic hardship, psychological pressure, fear, and uncertainty can weaken social solidarity as people prioritize their own survival.

#### 4.2.1 Aunt's ignorance

After their mother's death, Seita and Setsuko live with their aunt, who gradually becomes indifferent to their needs as food shortages and financial difficulties increase. Her rejection and eventual decision to force them to leave reflect social ignorance toward vulnerable individuals. This treatment shows how economic hardship and personal burdens can weaken empathy and family solidarity, leaving the children without adequate emotional and material support.

> (Flashback - Seita and Setsuko are playing the organ) Both: (Singing) higher than the roof, the Koi-Nobori. The large koi is the father and... [NOTE: Koi-Nobori = a colorful cone-like flag in the shape of carps that is displayed outside on the national holiday, Children's Day] Aunt: Stop it! What a thing to do in time of war? I'm the one who will be scorned! How senseless! [ALT: How irrational!] Really, what burden have been tossed my way! [LT: Really, what god-of misfortune has wandered in! even during the air-raid, you're never of any use... If you value your life that much, you should live in the shelter-hole! (1992: 13)

This flashback illustrates the aunt's emotional rejection of Seita and Setsuko. When the children sing and play the organ, her harsh response expresses frustration and makes Seita feel unwelcome. Although she does not directly ask them to leave, her words create psychological pressure and reflect a lack of empathy and emotional support. This social ignorance contributes to Seita's decision to leave the house.

> (Seita is packing their stuff onto a cart. Setsuko notices the Aunt coming.) Seita: We've overstayed our welcome. [LT: We've interrupted you for a very long time.] We'll be moving elsewhere. Aunt: <You say> elsewhere? <But> where are you going? Seita: I don't know for certain, yet. Aunt: Well, be careful... Sett-chan, goodbye. (1992: 13)

This scene depicts Seita's decision to leave his aunt's house because he feels unwelcome. The aunt responds with indifference and makes no effort to prevent their departure or provide further support. Her lack of empathy and concern reflects social ignorance, as she withdraws responsibility for the children's well-being and leaves them vulnerable to further hardship.

#### 4.2.2 Civil Authorities' Ignorance

*Grave of the Fireflies* depicts the social ignorance of civil authorities, particularly the police and medical personnel, toward vulnerable civilians during wartime. Instead of providing adequate protection and assistance, their responses are limited and largely

administrative, with little attention to the children's humanitarian needs. This lack of empathy and support reflects the failure of social institutions to respond effectively to vulnerable individuals in times of conflict.

> (At the local station,) Police: I understand what happened <very well>. Regarding this case, I'll consider the best solution after I talk to the offender and prepare a report, so you may leave. Man: But...! Police: You've hit him this much; you must be satisfied. (Seeing the man is still reluctant to leave,) Violence against a minor, causing injury [ALT: bodily harm]. man: (panicking,) Then, I'll ask you to take care of the rest! [ALT: Then, I trust you'll take care of the rest.] Police: I heard that today's air-raid was unexpected. Well, why don't you take a drink of water from the back? (Seita comes out from the station after some time.) (1992: 17)

While Seita is in police custody, the authorities do not investigate the circumstances of his actions or provide assistance for his basic needs. Their formal response overlooks his condition as a vulnerable child affected by wartime poverty and hunger. The lack of follow-up support for Seita and Setsuko reflects institutional indifference and social ignorance toward vulnerable civilians.

> (Doctor's office) Doctor: Breathe in. Breathe out. Seita: And her diarrhea hasn't stopped for several days now. Her rashes don't seem to be heat-rashes either... When I wash her with salt water, all it does is give her pain. Doctor: It's a prostration due to malnutrition. Her diarrhea is the result of that. Okay, next person! Seita: Some medicine or shots...? Setsuko: I don't like shots. Seita: Anyhow, please give her treatment of some kind. Please. Doctor: <There's no> medicine or anything... well, I suggest that she get some nourishment. That's all that can be done. Seita: You say nourishment, but... Doctor: (To the next patient,) what seems to be the matter? Seita: Where can you <possibly> find nourishment?! (1992: 18)

This scene depicts Seita taking Setsuko to a doctor when she is severely weakened by malnutrition. Although the doctor identifies her condition as malnutrition, he provides no further treatment or support. This inadequate response reflects social ignorance, as the healthcare provider fails to adequately address the urgent needs of a vulnerable child.

### 4.2.3 Society's Ignorance

During war and widespread poverty, social solidarity may weaken as communities prioritize survival. In *Grave of the Fireflies*, Seita and Setsuko receive limited support from those around them, leaving them increasingly isolated and vulnerable. This lack of social concern reflects social ignorance, as weakened social networks fail to provide adequate protection and assistance. Consequently, the children experience not only material deprivation but also emotional and social isolation.

> (Seita at one of the farms) Seita: And...we've traded all of Mom's kimono for rice and don't have anymore. From your place, we've purchased many things with money before... Man: I'm not talking about kimono or money. Though we're a farm, we don't make enough to distribute it to others all the time. (pause) Never mind that; don't you have other kin? [ET: relatives] Seita: Well...I can't get in touch with them. Man: Then, it's better for you to go back to that house. Besides, everything's rationed now. If you're not part of a community group, you can't eat. Apologize and ask them to let you stay. Seita: (pause) sorry <to have bothered you>. I'll try other places. (1992: 15-16)

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The dialogue between Seita and the farmer illustrates social ignorance toward civilians affected by war. Although Seita explains that he has exchanged his mother's kimonos for rice and has nothing left to barter, the farmer refuses to provide food. His response reflects weakened social solidarity under conditions of scarcity, where individual survival takes priority over helping others. Consequently, vulnerable individuals such as Seita and Setsuko are left without adequate support during wartime.

### 4.2.4 Setsuko's Death

Setsuko's death is one of the most tragic moments in *Grave of the Fireflies*. Seita faces her death largely alone, without meaningful emotional or social support from his relatives or community. The repeated rejection and lack of assistance he experiences throughout the film contribute to his increasing social isolation. Seita is ultimately left to handle Setsuko's cremation without a proper funeral or meaningful communal support. This situation reflects social ignorance, as the community fails to provide emotional and social support during a moment of profound loss. Thus, Setsuko's death represents not only a personal tragedy but also a social tragedy resulting from the absence of solidarity toward vulnerable war victims.

> (At the coal shop) Man: Here. The one sack of coal, special delivery. [ALT: one bale] If it's a child, you should borrow the burning ground from the temple. You take her clothes off and if you light the fire with soybean skin, it'll burn nicely. But... what nice weather! (Note: Do not think this man to be insensitive. Everyone has been to some degree during the war. It is truly sad that a child's death is nothing new or anything sensational.) (At an open field, Seita is preparing Setsuko's cremation. Setsuko is placed in the empty container the coal came in. Her few "treasures" are placed lovingly alongside of her. Seita pauses on the drop can, and sets it aside. He lights the fire and grimly watches the cremation. Morning turns to day, and day turns to evening. With the last remaining flames, the fireflies take flight from their resting spots among the field...) (1992: 20)

Seita's cremation of Setsuko without assistance illustrates the collapse of social solidarity during a humanitarian crisis. As a young boy, Seita is forced to bear the emotional and practical burden of arranging his sister's cremation alone. The absence of moral and material support from the surrounding community reflects his profound social isolation and demonstrates the failure of social structures to support vulnerable individuals in times of crisis.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of *Grave of the Fireflies*, the film represents structural violence and social ignorance experienced by the main characters, Seita and Setsuko, as victims of wartime conditions. Structural violence is reflected in the failure of social structures to fulfill basic needs and rights, including protection, education, food, and shelter. These conditions demonstrate how systems that should protect vulnerable individuals can instead contribute to their deprivation and suffering.

The film also portrays social ignorance through the lack of assistance, empathy, and solidarity from family, community, and formal institutions. This is evident in the aunt's indifference, the limited response of civil authorities, the community's lack of support, and the circumstances surrounding Setsuko's death. Together, structural violence and social ignorance intensify the children's vulnerability, isolation, and suffering, demonstrating the profound humanitarian consequences of war.

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