

Homo Ludens: The Changing Meaning and Function of Game from Traditional Life to Culture Industry 'Squid Game' Example

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Abstract: Game is a fundamental part of human life and a universal phenomenon. Throughout history, games have played an important role in every age from childhood to adulthood, contributing to personal and social development. However, over time, with the development of industrial processes, games have become a part of the culture industry and this has led to a change in the meaning and function of games. This study emphasises the relationship of the series *Squid Game* with the game and its changing function. In the theoretical part of the study, the definition of the concept of game and its relationship with culture are evaluated by focusing on Johan Huizinga's 'Game Theory'. Then, the traditional children's games in the series *Squid Game* are analysed in the context of Huizinga's game theory and the function and meaning of the game that has been lost with capitalist life are revealed. In the study, four of the six children's games in the series were analysed using semiotic and discourse analysis methods. These analyses show how the elements of fun, sincerity and enjoyment change under difficult conditions. The findings reveal that economic pressures and social inequalities have transformed the function of games and that children's games have become deadly and cruel in the struggle for survival and the ambition to make money in modern society. As a result, it is understood that children's games in the series have lost their innocence by breaking away from their real ties with the capitalist system.

Keywords: Game, Culture Industry, Johan Huizing, Squid Game, Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction

Generally accepted as an entertainment and leisure activity in daily life, play has existed throughout history and has survived until today with its function covering individual and social life (Vatandaş, 2020, p.915). According to Ehrmann (1968, p.48), there was a game in the beginning. The beginning of play developed when people imitated what they saw in natural life. As a result of primitive people's struggle for survival, they developed hunting rituals by imitating them, and these were effective in the development of many games over time. Nutku (2011, p.17) divides the development of games into three basic principles: Imitation, action and collective participation. Games, which emerged as simple imitative behaviour, started as a simple field of activity and have maintained their continuity until today, becoming part of rituals such as belief, war and art over time (Yengin, 2012; Ergün & Mısırlı, 2022). The famous historian Johan Huizinga (2021) defines the importance of playing games in human life as "homo ludens" (man who plays games). In fact, it is possible to consider human life itself as a game (Cantaş & Koluçık, 2020, p. 413). Huizinga (2021, p. 23) gives examples from drama and literature and compares the world to a stage where everyone plays their own role. In short, the play is perceived as life and life as a play (Hazar, 2021, p. 8). In addition, Huizinga (2021) defines play as an optional, voluntary action. According to Fink (2015, p. 14), play is not a fringe phenomenon in the realm of human life, a random phenomenon that only occasionally occurs. Play is essentially a part of the ontological structure of human existence; it is a fundamental phenomenon of vital importance. Based on this, it can be said that games have very different personal and social effects, from the physical and mental development of the individual to social development.

Games are a favourite activity not only for children but also for young people and adults. This activity is one that supports and completes personal development in the childhood phase that begins with the

baby's perception of the world. Therefore, play is the most functional experience and an integral part of childhood (Kargı & Akin, 2007, p. 2009). Through play, children make discoveries, have fun, learn, socialise, relax, develop cognitively and progress (Artar et al., 2007, p. 271). Play is an element that has an important place in human development from birth to death and contains cultural elements that people cannot give up throughout history and whose value is gradually increasing (Aksoy & Aksoy, 2021, p. 1). Therefore, the social function of the game maintains its importance from the past to the present. Due to the impact of the game on human life, it has enabled different researchers and thinkers to examine it in various aspects (Ehrmann, 1968; Caillois, 2001; Fler, & Hedegaard, 2010; Fink, 2015, Huizinga; 2021). Today, games continue to be a field of scientific research. This is due to the fact that games have become a part of industrial processes with technological developments as well as their functions.

A review of the literature on the *Squid Game* series, which broke worldwide viewing records and became a global phenomenon, reveals that there are few studies on the subject. As the series attracts the attention of many viewers worldwide, the contribution of studies on this topic to the literature is important. A review of the literature on the *Squid Game* series shows that game theory studies have been conducted in a variety of contexts. Studies have been conducted on the teaching of the *Squid Game* series in the classroom (Geerling et al., 2023), vocabulary development (Chonnia & Izzah, 2022), mathematical learning (Yustina & Yahfizham, 2023; Sani & Syarif 2023), meta-heuristic algorithms that suggest strategies and rules (Azizi et al., 2023), collages that facilitate reading and learning for viewers (Borchard, 2022). In addition, an axiological perspective on the ethical issues of the *Squid Game* series and its impact on human moral values (Mukarromah et al., 2022) and ethical questions about the game (Chung, 2023) were conducted. In addition, due to the appreciation of the series by its viewers, it has also had a significant response on social media, and descriptive studies have been conducted on this topic (Siregar et al., 2021). The strong narrative of the series and the psychological and dramatic stories of the characters, their participation in violent acts to stay in the game and win prizes have also been the subject of several studies (Tuna & Akgün, 2022). The survival efforts of people who risk their lives by risking death to solve their material problems have been examined in the axis of the concept of "necropolitics" (Park, 2024), and in another study, a descriptive analysis of the ruthlessness of the competitive capitalist system has been made (Swetha et al., 2022; Akyıldız & Şeşen, 2022). Another study suggests that the child characters in *Squid Game* must eventually be overcome in order to transform into men in the transition from innocence to maturity (Yoo, 2023). Studies on *Squid Game* focus not only on the content, but also on the relationship of the series to popular culture and how it is part of the industrial process (Payzın & Tuncer, 2022), a critical reading of McLuhan's "global village" thesis in relation to *Squid Game* (Míša, 2022), and the impact of the viral effect of social media on the rapid spread and popularisation of the series (Mukarromah et al., 2022; Cho, 2021; Sparks, 2021; Horn, 2021; Pelin et al. , 2023). Although this study of The *Squid Game* series has some commonalities with other articles, it differs from other studies in that it reveals the changing function of the game. In addition, it is completely different from other studies in terms of the method used to reveal the changing function and meaning of the game, and it can be said that it has unique value in this respect.

In this study, an analysis of the *Squid Game* series is conducted to reveal the changing function and meaning of the game. The *Squid Game* series focuses on the transition of the game's role from traditional society to modern society and its forgotten function. This change is particularly related to the influence of capitalist life and the industrialization of culture. In the *Squid Game* series, emphasis is placed on the traditional meaning of the game, highlighting the increasingly industrialized functions of games. The purpose of this study is to reveal how the game loses its traditional meaning and real function through the *Squid Game* series. In this context, firstly, a general definition of the concept of the game is made, and the relationship of the game with culture is emphasized. In the analyses related to the game in the series, discourse analysis method is used primarily to analyze the dialogues and the structure of the game. To

concretize the meanings of discourse analysis, visuals of the games “Red Light Green Light, Dalgona/Sugar Game, Marbles, and Squid Game” in the series are included, and the changing function of the game is strengthened by using the semiotic method. Thus, the two methods are used in a way that supports each other to carry out the analyses.

2. The Concept of Game and the Function of Game

There are many definitions in the literature of the concept of game, which can be found in all areas of life. In the most basic sense, a game is a cultural activity outside the real world, organised by people alone or together to have fun and spend time, with certain rules (Yengin, 2012, p. 86; Selvi-Bener, 2013, p. 11). The fact that the word ‘pais’, which means child in ancient Greek, comes from the same root as the words ‘paizo’ (to play, to have fun) and ‘paidia’ (play, entertainment) (Golden, 1993, p.53) is an inference about the nature of play. In English, ‘game’ and ‘play’ are both verbs and nouns. In the past, the words ‘game’ or ‘play’ were used in Turkish in the sense of ‘play/entertainment, leisure activities such as playing instruments, music, raks, playing instruments, dancing, spending free time’ (Nişanyan, 2007, p.654). In today’s Turkish Language Association Dictionary (TDK), the word game is used for many different types of games and refers to game activities in many different areas. Game is defined as entertainment with certain rules, spending time, the way the artist plays his role in theatre and cinema, the work prepared to be performed and played on stage, all the movements made with musical accompaniment, all kinds of competitions based on agility, all kinds of surprising movements made to defeat his opponent in wrestling, the result obtained by winning a certain number of sides in backgammon and tennis, intrigue, scheme, order, trick (TDK, 2023). As can be seen from this definition, gaming covers a wide range of activities that occupy an important place in the lives of societies and individuals.

Huizinga argued that play is the basis of all human culture, including religion (Coleman, 2017, p. 374). When we look at human life, it can be likened to a scripted game scene and what people do, as in computer games. According to Huizinga (2021, p. 14), if the content of our actions is subjected to an in-depth analysis, it can be concluded that all human actions are merely games. Human beings have resorted to play to make sense of their daily actions. Games, which started at a primitive level, have spread to all areas of life over time.

“According to the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, a play is the representation of people ‘in action’” (Brockett & Ball, 2018, p.40). This representation, which Aristotle basically says for theatre plays, is valid for all plays that continue to exist at different levels in life. Play allows individuals to structure past, present and future experiences. Thanks to play, individuals have the opportunity to show their characteristics such as creativity, language and social adaptation by behaving as they wish in a safe environment (Artar, et al. 2007, p. 271). In addition, in childhood, play is an aid that provides a source for the future, creates a connection with the past, and at the same time provides experience in the context of preparing for adulthood (Aksoy & Aksoy, 2021, p. 2). In the traditional sense, street games are a part of children’s social lives and contribute to their physical and social development (Hazar, 2021, p. 3). In addition, traditional games play an important role in the development and socialisation of individuals.

In the traditional sense, games are defined as games in which the players determine the game equipment, the playing field and the rules of the game themselves by using the materials that spontaneously exist in nature (stone, soil, wood, bone, etc.), where creativity and productivity are at the forefront, but where a limited number of players are involved due to their structure (Hazar, 2021, p.9). In most traditional games, gain is not important, having fun and socialising are among the most important goals. Structurally, game activity is not an individual and isolated action; the game is open to fellow players as playmates (Fink, 2015, p.19).

In addition, the ways, rules and goals of games are often different. In his work 'Philosophical Investigations', Ludwig Wittgenstein tries to draw attention to the diversity of games by asking questions about them. Wittgenstein (2006, p. 48) invites to analyse for games by asking what is common to them all? According to Wittgenstein, "games must have something in common, otherwise they cannot be called 'games'. For when you look at games, you may not find a common feature in all of them, but you will see similarities, connections, and a whole series of them (2006, p.48). Wittgenstein identifies game similarities with family similarities.

In addition to some general characteristics of games, games differ according to their own characteristics. Although games such as board games, card games, sports games all have some common features, each game has a very different purpose, liberating function and entertaining aspect. Therefore, the game is accepted as a field of action (Caillois, 2001, Huizinga, 2021) that is freely participated in without any material benefit or profit. Han's (2019, p.61) statement on play that "play is not played with 'thereness' in 'boredom' or 'anxiety'" sums up the general motivation of the study.

In the modern sense, games are shaped in a professional process in which players play with ready-made tools and equipment provided to them in advance, playgrounds are predetermined, and game fiction and game rules are shaped in a professional process. In addition to the entertainment value of these games from the past to the present, there is also the commodity value of games created by technology. Today, popular computer games are based on modern games from the past to the present. In these games, dozens of people can play at the same time and they constitute the playground of a gigantic virtual world where the phenomenon of space and time disappears.

Today, with the inclusion of computer technology and new media features in games, it changes the socialisation function of games. The most important aspect of traditional games that differs from digital games is the professional structuring of the game production process and the social interaction dimension. Traditional games do not have a professional protector and are anonymous. However, digital games are the result of industrial production that has commodity value itself, apart from those involved in the game. The game is not anonymous and the interaction of people takes place through a tool (computer, telephone, etc.). In addition, in today's digital games, the identities of the people are expressed through pseudonyms, thus alienating them. Therefore, the purpose and meaning of the social function of the game today has changed due to the change in cultural processes. Gamification as a means of production has destroyed the redemptive potential of the game (Han, 2019, p.60). If the game is accepted as a cultural phenomenon, the social function of games in traditional culture has entered a new phase with technological development.

3. Game-Culture Relationship

Looking at the historical process, it is seen that the history of the game is as old as the history of man and that societies bear traces of cultural structures. Games are formed together with culture in the focus of socialisation practices and social dynamics of human history (Gülsoy, 2019). However, the view that games existed before culture and contributed to the development of culture has changed with Huizinga. "According to Huizinga, the game is prior to culture, not as a result of emergence from various cultures or a coincidence, but on the contrary, it is one of the factors in the birth of various forms of culture" (And, 2012, p.27). Huizinga's greatest achievement is that he discovered the element of play as a common denominator and an important cultural factor (Ehrmann, 1968, p. 31). Huizinga, in his own work, prioritizes play, arguing that play exists superior to or independent of culture (Huizinga, 2021). Huizinga "reveals the role of play in both culture and history despite being a historian" (Dursun, 2014, p.143). In general, Huizinga's thesis is that play is not only central to human experience; it constitutes everything that is meaningful in human culture. Culture, as Huizinga argues, does not create play; play creates culture. Wild games, which started collectively, developed over time, became regularised and turned into rituals and religious rites/ceremonies. Certain sacred ceremonies, rites and rituals came

into existence through games (Huizinga, 2021). In almost every instance that Huizinga identifies as sacred, play highlights the central and defining feature of our most valued cultural rituals. Therefore, according to Huizinga, play is not something we do; it is about who you are.

There was play before language. In certain periods of human history, some games were needed to explain the cyclical framework of life (Yıldırım, 2021, p. 19). Whether primitive societies or contemporary societies, play has maintained its place as an important phenomenon in life. Primitive man's struggle against nature, his struggle for existence and his awareness of himself have formed the source of the development of the game. Yıldırım (2021, pp. 22-23), in support of Huizinga, states that "man's playing or expressing himself through play is a situation that transcends ages and cultures". Play also plays a functional role in increasing the relationality between cultures. In addition, the game serves the communication function of individuals and societies. "In the final analysis, just as culture is a form of communication, play and play is a form of communication" (Ehrmann, 1968, p.56). It affects the individual's acculturation and socialisation dimensions.

Huizinga's treatment of play as independent of culture and his prioritisation of play were later criticised by many scholars. In contrast to Huizinga, Ehrmann and Fink do not see play and reality in complete opposition. Fink intertwines the phenomenon of play and life. According to Fink (2015, p. 11), "the fact that we live in play, that we do not see it as an external event, indicates that humans are the 'subjects' of play". Fink grounds play as a fundamental possibility of social existence. He sees play as an intrinsic form of human unity played together (Fink, 2015, p. 19). Although Fink and Ehrmann agree with Huizinga on many points, they do not separate play from the familiar world and culture.

The play "temporarily leaves real life and enters into its own order and world" (And, 2012, p.28). This order has its own rules and equipment. "In the historical process, the materials used in games, rules and ways of playing games have constantly changed and diversified" (Aksoy & Aksoy, 2021, p. 18). In the early periods, games played with materials such as stone, bone, wood, sand, and water contain cultural traces of the social environment. However, the game materials created in the natural conditions in which the early people lived were replaced by fabricated products over time. The games played by adults have been limited to certain areas, the areas where children play have been confined to certain spaces, and the game tools have started to consist of single-level, fabricated toys produced in certain standards. With the increase in digital life, games based on computer technology have increased and toys have turned into tools that decorate children's rooms.

Games bear the traces of the norms and rules of the society. The rules are definite and cannot be broken, and breaking the rules requires its own penalties. These rules and punishments constitute the tense nature of the game. While the struggle to win increases the tension, games also involve conflicts of interest and victories. Games differ from a real conflict situation in that they must be conducted within certain rules. Although games such as chess, draughts and cards are simple games, they are determined within the framework of certain rules and end with victory or winning. Therefore, game players and fans have certain goals (Bakoğlu, 1991, pp. 2-3). Players have certain value judgements besides their aims. Therefore, in the social life to which they belong, players are "bound by certain value judgements: courage, resilience, opportunities and most importantly the obligation to obey the rules of the game despite the desire to win" (And, 2012, p. 29).

Both the existence of the game independent from the cultural process and its function affecting culture have changed with modern life. Therefore, the game's own archaic foundations and value judgements, its seriousness and entertainment side started to experience a collapse with modern life. In fact, the game has been detached from its own context and its traditional bond and meaning have collapsed. The self-power of the game has turned into a creative activity of the culture industry and has lost its own seriousness. With the disappearance of the distinction between play and seriousness, politics, war, economy and morality, which are the serious affairs of life, have turned into a so-called game, and the

game has lost its indispensable qualities such as spontaneity, simplicity and joy (Dursun, 2014, p.149). However, Huizinga (2021, p.21) states that animals also play games and that this is a situation far beyond mechanics, that humans also play games and are aware of this, and that this situation can be explained by the irrational existence of the game beyond being intelligent beings. Schiller (1999, p.61) also draws attention to the importance of play in human life with the statements “man is fully human only when he plays and plays only when he is human”. Schiller also states that play forms the basis of aesthetic art and the more difficult art of life. However, the irrational nature of play has been rationalized and removed from its real context by the culture industry. The game has merged with the power to create industrial culture, and over time it has become a mere leisure activity within culture and has begun to lose its true function.

Internationally, the game has become a political struggle and a race for supremacy. Today, the main purpose of sporting activities is to show national superiority by winning gold, silver and bronze medals in international competitions. This situation causes games to be detached from their real meaning and to be introduced into a new world of meaning. Pleasure, joy and sacrifice which Huizinga states as the distinctive features of games, are lost; therefore, the game loses its true game quality (Dursun, 2014, p. 150). According to Huizinga, what stands out in the game and exists independently of culture is ‘joy’ and ‘humor’. These are the essence that makes the game a game. In this case, the exchange in the game is to win, except for the purpose of profit (Huizinga, 2021, p.80). Honour, prestige and reputation are the gains in the following processes. Therefore, in the traditional games of the past, the economic aspect of the games is not related to today's commodity value. Historically, in many great games, honour, fame, names came to the fore and certain values were dedicated to the winner of the game. However, in no period of history have games been politicised as in modern life and entered into the vortex of the industrial field.

4. Purpose and Method of the Study

In this study, the games in the *Squid Game* series were analysed through discourse analysis and semiotics methods. Discourse analysis allows us to analyse how social power relations and cultural codes are shaped through the games in the series. This method analyses not only the words and sentences in texts, but also how language interacts with the social environment and how meanings are constructed through this interaction (Parsa & Olgundeniz, 2014, p. 105). Moreover, it is possible to consider visuality as a kind of discourse (Rose, 2023, p. 232). In this context, the visuals of the games in the *Squid Game* series were analysed together with the language and discourses used by the characters.

Semiotics, on the other hand, plays a supporting role to discourse analysis in this study and analyses signs (plain meaning) and their deeper meanings (connotations). Semiotics is used by theorists such as Peirce and Saussure to analyse the meaning of cultural codes (Smith-Shark, 2016, p. 58). According to Peirce (1982), the relationship between an object and its sign can be indicative, visual or symbolic (consensual). All three types of signs carry meaning and play an important role in the construction of reality and thought. Barthes defines the aim of semiotics as revealing the structure of meaning systems outside language (Barthes, 1993, p. 72). Barthes also states that signs have two levels of meaning: The meaning at the first level is the denotative meaning, which is the dictionary meaning of the sign; this is the first perception formed in our minds. On the second level is the connotative meaning, which is a deeper and indirect meaning. Barthes argues that this second level of meaning contains ideological effects.

For the analysis of the study, screenshots taken from the game scenes in the series were used. In this analysis, the concepts of Signs, Signifier, Signified/Denotative Meaning and Connotative Meaning were taken as reference. Each scene was first analysed as a signifier, then the symbols or expressions representing these signifiers were determined. Afterwards, the plain meanings (denotative) of these symbols were analysed and then the connotative meanings (connotative), which are the deeper, indirect

and ideological meanings carried by these signs, were analysed. With this method, the surface meanings were evaluated and then the changing function of the play was tried to be revealed by analysing the social and cultural subtexts of the play.

The changes in the functions of the plays that stand out in the analysis were associated with Huizinga's basic concepts of play. The indicators and discourses in the play scenes were used to understand how the initial innocent and entertaining structure of the plays transformed. After these indicators were identified, the effects of this change in the function of the game in the social and cultural context were explained by quoting Huizinga's game theories. In this way, it is clearly demonstrated how games have gone from being a source of innocence and entertainment to becoming a part of the capitalist system.

4.1. Sample of the study

In this study, purposive sampling method was preferred. This method is based on the principle of selecting the items that can best represent the universe based on the information the researcher has about the universe and the objectives of the study (Babbie, 2020). The reason for choosing the *Squid Game* series as a sample is that the games in the series have a certain systematic that meets the conceptual discussions and definitions. Of the six children's games in the series, four (red light green light, dalgona/candy game, marble game and squid game) were selected for analysis. In the selection of the games, the games that did not have a meaningful connection with the childhood of the actors were excluded from the study. Therefore, the analysis was limited to only four games that had a deep connection with the childhood memories of the players.

4.2. Plot of the *Squid Game* series

The South Korean series *Squid Game*, released by Netflix in 2021, is structured around six different children's games. At the centre of the narrative are 456 debt-ridden individuals who occupy the lower echelons of society and face severe economic hardship. Marginalised by the capitalist system and struggling with financial instability in adulthood, these participants are forced into a high-stakes competition for survival. Unable to pay their debts and beset by various socio-economic challenges, these individuals are selected by a mysterious organisation and transported to a secret island. The aim of the competition is to award a substantial cash prize to the individual who manages to survive by successfully completing a series of childhood-esque games.

The *Squid Game* series offers a critical examination of global capitalism, with a particular focus on how the capitalist structure of South Korea has a profound effect on the lives of individuals. As a result, the series is often interpreted as an allegory of South Korean capitalism, offering nuanced insights into issues such as economic inequality, debt and poverty (Geerling et al., 2023). The six children's games depicted in the series are instrumental in articulating this critique, highlighting how the individualism fostered by the capitalist system has transformed social culture and eroded the traditional meaning of these games. The series also illustrates how the wealthy manipulate these games for their own morbid pleasure, turning them into deadly competitions. The depiction of childhood games losing their original meaning in the adult world, as well as the depiction of how human nature changes under certain conditions, is crucial to understanding the thematic concerns of the series. The following analysis explores how the cultural function and meaning of the games have changed, using four of these childhood games as key examples.

5. Analysis and Findings

In this section, the visuals and discourses of four children's games in the series *Squid Game* were analysed. The analyses started with the squid game played by the children shown at the beginning of the series, and then the four games in the series were analysed.

5.1. Analysis of the *Squid Game* played by children

Squid Game is a South Korean children's game, also known as 'Squid Gaisan' or 'Squid Takkari'. In the game, there are two teams: offence and defence. The offensive team tries to reach a certain goal, while the defence team tries to prevent them (Arslan & Kotan, 2023, p.79). The squid game is shown in the beginning scenes of the series and in the last game on the island. Visuals of the scenes where the squid game is played at the beginning of the series are presented below.

Image 1

*Image of Children Waiting to Play
Squid Game*



Image 2

*View of Squid Game Played by Children
from a Hilltop Angl*



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Signs: Image of the *Squid Game* played by children (Images 1, 2).

Signifier: A view of children playing *Squid Game* at eye level and from the top angle of how the game is played

Signified/ Denotative Meaning: In black and white frames, accompanied by the sound of a flute and an external narrator voice, how the game is played and the general rules of the game are explained. In the first scenes of the series, the pure nature of the children's game and its traditional cultural function are emphasised.

Connotative Meaning: The children's game of squid offers a real challenge and enjoyment, without the influence of a third party or system (capitalism). This is reflected in the player's total immersion in the game and in the enthusiasm of the children shouting 'hooray' at the finale. The fact that the series begins with a children's game emphasises the unspoilt, pure nature of the game.

Each game has its own rules and these rules are binding for all players; when the rules are violated, the game collapses and ends. The "squid game" in the opening scene of the series is played in an area delimited by certain lines and involves strict rules and time-space limitations. The six children's games in the series have similar rules to games in everyday life. Each game continues within its set rules and order (Huizinga, 2021). However, the difference between the games in the series and real games is that the nature of the game is distorted with the motivation of death and great reward. While in real games, cheaters are disabled, in the series, 456 people are allowed to cheat. In the games played on the island, chivalry is ignored and the players are left alone with their own nature, which undermines the true nature and meaning of the games. While playing together in real games brings players closer (And, 2012), in the *Squid Game* series, those involved in the game deepen their mistrust towards each other over time. Partial groupings and co-operation in the game only serve the purpose of survival for certain interests.

In games based on organized violence, players are usually played within certain rules that take into account their weight, age and height, and equality is ensured. However, in games such as *Squid Game*, the rules do not equalise the abilities and powers of the players, and the stronger one is free to act as he

wants. This situation evokes social Darwinism and modern capitalism and emphasises the capitalist world where the strong oppress the weak.

No material gain or benefit is expected in games (Huizinga, 2021). Caillois (2001, p.5) also supports Huizinga's views and states that "one of the characteristics of the game is that it does not produce any wealth or goods". However, 455 people in the series are forced to participate in the game due to financial difficulties. The incentive (money) offered by the series as a reward stands out as a powerful metaphor emphasising the loss of innocence of the players. This situation, which is embodied by the relationship established with childhood and past games, is important for understanding the changing function of the game. In the game, it is shown how childish innocence is damaged under difficult conditions and how the elements of pleasure are destroyed. The relationship between the squid game played by the children in the series and the final game on the island reveals the lost and changing function of the game.

5.2. Analysis of the game "red light, green light"

The first game, 'Red Light, Green Light,' at the facility on a remote island begins with the players standing at the far end of the field. Opposite them, near the finish line, is a giant doll (Image-3). The aim of the players is to cross the field and reach the opposite side. When the doll says 'Green Light', the song plays and the players move. When the doll says 'Red Light', they have to stop. The doll turns its head while singing the song and looks at the players again when it stops. Thanks to its cameras, it detects those who move and excludes them from the game. Players can only move when they hear 'Green Light'. Every player who crosses the line is considered the winner (Image-6). The elimination logic in the first game works similarly in the following games. Players do not realise at first that 'elimination' means being shot. When they see that those who are shot are dead, panic sets in and those who move are killed and eliminated. When the game ends, the players indicate that they do not wish to continue, and the game is cancelled by a vote. They return to the challenging conditions of their daily lives. After a while, cards are left with invitations to rejoin the game. Desperate in the real world, most of the players are forced to return to the island. The visuals of the game 'Red Light, Green Light' are presented below.

Image 3

Digital Image of the Players



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Image 4

Red Light, Green Light Front view of the Game



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Image 5

Still Image of Seong Gi-Hun



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Image 6

Image of the Red Line



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Signs: Red Light, Green Light game (Image 3, 4, 5, 6)

Signifier: The four images show the process from the beginning to the end of the game from different angles.

Signified/Denotative Meaning: 456 people who think they are playing a normal children's game experience panic and fear when they realize that elimination results in death.

Connotative Meaning: The children's meaning and purpose of the game has been lost, and children's games have become a tool to satisfy the pleasure of VIPs. The innocence and childishness of children's games in the beginning have lost their meaning in the adult world; games have lost their unifying function and become a part of the capitalist system. This process shows that individual interest has come to the forefront in the struggle for human survival.

Games require voluntary participation. Every game is essentially a voluntary act (Suits, 2014; Huizinga, 2021, p. 26). However, due to the difficult living conditions in the series, the players were forced to participate in the game. Here, participation is not voluntary, and the players had to return to the island knowing that they would die. This situation requires a revision of the analyses of Huizinga (2021) and Suits (2014) or a focus on the changing function of the game. For every action in the game requires voluntary participation. A person can play a game voluntarily by accepting its rules, and this contradicts coercion. In the Red Light, Green Light game in the series, the players agreed to participate, but participation became coercive because they did not know that the rules had changed. In this way, the voluntary nature of the game became coercive, and the known rules were overridden. The game, which was initially seen as a normal and fun children's game, became deadly. The innocence of children's play was destroyed, and the elements of freedom, pleasure and fun were removed.

According to Huizinga (2021), play is a free activity. Similarly, Caillois (2001, p. 6) defines play as a voluntary and optional activity, stating that when one is forced to play, it ceases to be play. Building on Huizinga and Caillois' association of play with free action, it can be argued that in *Squid Game* the space constructed for the participants and organisers falls outside the realm of free action. Players are forced to participate in the game against their will and personal pleasure. Those who wish to leave the game have no real option, and each character embodies the struggles they face in real life. The participants are individuals marginalised by the harsh conditions of South Korean society. The rules of the game have been changed by those who prioritise their own pleasures (the VIPs), and the game is designed to exclude the possibility of free action by the individual. The players, who in the real world are struggling with debt and deprived of social rights, are involuntarily forced to participate in the game against their free will. This shift transforms the game from a part of everyday life into a struggle for survival for the participants. The inequality within the game mirrors the unequal order of the outside world.

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 5, the game organisers see the participants on the same level as characters in digital games.

Reiland (2022, p. 639) notes that games do not always have to be based on voluntary action. However, even if a game is not rooted in voluntarism, it still contains an element of freedom, enjoyment and spontaneity. In *Squid Game*, on the other hand, there is a ruthless external world. It forces participants into the game. The 455 individuals who enter the game are fleeing a daily life made brutal by economic rules. In the series, what intensifies the desire to win is the substantial monetary reward on offer. This gambling activity, which is closely linked to everyday life, becomes compulsive because it represents not only a reward but also the hope of financial salvation. In this situation, participants are forced to choose between two bad options, blurring the line between life and death. For those who join the game, the distinction between life and death has disappeared, because the purpose of life has been devalued by the system.

Huizinga (2021, p. 27) defines play as a sphere of activity independent of everyday life, separate from the mechanisms of direct satisfaction of needs and desires. In the series, however, play is directly linked to everyday life, to pleasure and to essential needs. The intrinsic purpose of the game has been lost, becoming merely a tool for satisfying the pleasures of the VIPs. As a result, the function of the game as a complement to everyday life has disappeared. The innocence and childlike qualities depicted in the children's play scenes at the beginning of the series lose their meaning in the adult world. Play is thus transformed from an end in itself to a means to an end. The importance and cultural function of play in South Korean society is highlighted by the contrast with the children's games at the beginning of the series. The innocent, childlike, unifying and community-strengthening functions of play have weakened, and with the rise of the capitalist system, social bonds and moral values have deteriorated. A coercive relationship has been established between the capitalist system, the game organizers and the players.

5.3. Analysis of the umbrella/sugar mold (dalgona-umbrella man) game

As shown in Figure 8, the contestants are taken to a playground similar to children's games and asked to choose certain shapes. Sang-woo chooses the triangle, Ali the circle, Gi-hun the umbrella and Old Man the star. In the game 'Dalgona candy', players are asked to remove the shapes made of dalgona candies that match the shapes they have chosen without breaking them. Gi-hun removes the umbrella shape, which is a difficult choice, by licking the honeycomb. Players who fail to remove the shape or break it are also killed. At the end of the game, player 119, who cannot remove the shape, takes a gun from one of the men in red with a triangle symbol on his head and wounds the man with a square symbol. The other masked men also point guns at him. Player 119 asks the man in red to take off his mask. Seeing that the person unmasked is a child, Player 119 commits suicide with his gun. The man in red, whose face is exposed, cannot escape from being killed. Visuals and semiotic analyses of the play are presented below.

Image 7

Image of Children Rushing to Dalgona Candy



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Image 8

View of the Hall of the Dalgona Game



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Signs: Scenes from the Dalgona play (Image 7 and Image 8)

Signifier: In Image 7, there is a scene of children running to get candy, while in Image 8, there is an image of adult competitors taken to the playground.

Signified/ Denotative Meaning: Image 7 shows a group of children playing a game and running to get candy after the game. Image 8, on the other hand, shows the adult contestants brought to the same area, looking at the vehicles in which children's games are played and waiting with curiosity to see what kind of game they will play. Children's games, which were played with innocence and joy in the past, have now turned into a deadly competition in which adults participate. Players have to fulfil the tasks assigned to them in order to survive, and if they violate the simple rules of the game, they face elimination, i.e. death. Although the symbols and shapes used in the game are reminiscent of children's games, this time the price of losing in the game will be the loss of their lives.

Connotative Meaning: The games depict how the capitalist system corrupts individuals and weakens social bonds. For VIPs, games have turned into an entertainment that objectifies the lives of the lower class. Games have become devoid of moral values and the struggle for survival has evolved into a system in which individuals try to outwit each other through cheating and deception.

The second game of the series, the 'umbrella/dalgona' game, is presented in connection with past children's games (Image 7). While the symbols in the candy game are associated with childhood games, it is emphasised that these games played with joy turn into people who cheat under difficult conditions in the adult world. Sang-woo's misleading his teammates with the desire to win shows how people can change under pressure. It also emphasises how the social and cultural meanings of games differ. Sang-woo tells Kang Sae-byeok 'you are a North Korean refugee, all the games we play are the games I played when I was a child', while Ali compares the 'circle' to the moon in his hometown, revealing the cultural differences of games.

Despite the connection of the game with the past and the emotions it arouses in the players, it is emphasised that the meaning of a simple children's game has changed, the innocence of childhood has been lost and games no longer have the same meaning. This situation is embodied in a scene between Gi-hun and Sang-woo. Gi-hun asks Sang-woo what they should do but Sang-woo does not give information about the content of the game, although he has guessed the game. Sang-woo says, "It can be dangerous to act together, if we all choose the same way, we can make things difficult". To convince his teammates, he says, "There is a saying in investing: don't put all your eggs in the same basket." In response to these statements, Gi-Hun praises Sang-woo by pointing out that he "entered Seoul University at the top of his class". After the praise, everyone chooses their own shape. Oh Il-nam uses a critical expression while choosing the star, saying "we rarely see stars in this era".

As the plays progress, contrasts such as good-bad and right-wrong are emphasized, showing how the capitalist system corrupts human nature. Huizinga (2021, p. 25) states that play has no moral function, it is outside the opposites of good-bad and right-wrong. However, in the series, games constantly bring these concepts to the fore, emphasizing that values such as sin and virtue, morality and immorality are increasingly ignored. By drawing attention to how social and economic difficulties change the game, it is explained that a system is created in which actors are objectified and neutralized. The actors are selected from the most vulnerable segments of society and turned into a spectacle in which they must kill each other in order to survive. Economic obligations and mental desperation compelled them to participate in the game, thus revealing that they had no real choice. The games are constructed as the objects of VIPs rather than the individual wishes of the players, and a critique of a system in which social ties are weakened and individualism comes to the fore is presented.

5.4. Analysis of the “marble” game

This game, known locally by various names such as marble, bilya, cicoz, cille and mile, is a game played by children in many societies and is still played in many places. Although the marble game, known as 'daeliseog geim' in Korea, is called by different names and played with different rules, the main tool is always marbles (Arslan & Kotan, 2023, p.78). The main objective in marble games is to get the opponent's marbles. Some images of the game are presented below.

Image 9

Old Neighbourhood Image from the Game



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Image 11

Image of Abdul Ali and Sang-woo



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Image 10

Image of Il-nam and Gi-hun



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Image 12

Image Sae-byeok and Li-yeong



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Signs: Image of the neighbourhood where the marble game is played and the people who will play (Image, 9, 10, 11, 12)

Signifier: An artificial playground reflecting the neighbourhood culture and images of two people playing marble game.

Signified/Denotative Meaning: By giving indicators of the neighbourhood where the players spent their childhood, a connection with their past is established. Before coming to the playground, the players are taken into a large white hall and it is explained that the game will be played with two people. Participants try to choose their playmates according to personal characteristics such as strong, weak, cunning, naive. In these choices, gender inequalities and discourses against women are also included, drawing attention to the relationship of games with gender.

Connotative Meaning: Children's games played for friendship and entertainment have turned into a struggle for survival based on selfishness, cheating and deception in the modern capitalist system. The function of games that strengthen social bonds has

weakened, and individual interests and the urge to survive have come to the fore. The behaviour of Gi-hun and other characters shows how the capitalist system corrupts human nature and the loss of moral values, embodying that the game has become a commodity.

In addition to revealing the nature of people in general through a game, the fact that the game takes place spatially in a place where the old neighbourhood culture is lived reminds the longing for past memories and focuses on the changing function of the game. This is revealed in the dialogues between Oh Il-nam (Old Uncle) and Gi-hun (image 10):

Il-nam: "I used to live in a neighbourhood just like this".

Gi-hun: "I used to live in an alleyway very similar to this one".

The general narrative of the series and the dialogues between the characters draw attention to the neighborhood culture where childhood and values of the past period are lived. In the final episode of the series, Il-nam's discourses and expressions about why he designed this game reflect the real characteristics of the game. This is reinforced by Il-nam and Gi-hun's discourses and aspirations. In addition to reflecting the general characteristics of the game, the marble game is also important in terms of emphasising the friendships established.

In the past, the erosion of naturalness, simplicity, sincerity, and camaraderie within neighborhoods is encapsulated by the term "kanka" (buddy). Gi-hun asks, "Mr Uncle, have you ever played marbles?" and Il-nam says, "Of course I have, I used to play marbles a lot when I was a kid, I was pretty good at it". Gi-hun says, "I was good at it too, I was relieved, I was afraid it would be a game of strength". Il-nam says, "Let's be friends" and they agree to be friends. This reflects the sincerity and honesty of Il-nam, who longs for the game, and Gi-hun, who has a pure and clean nature. At this point, the rules of the game have not yet been determined; the players understand the natural situation they played as children and the real game in the spatial atmosphere created. However, with the later announcement, the expectations of the game disappear. The rules and conditions of the game now continue under the tension of death, and the desire to survive leads Gi-hun to cheat. Moreover, the arbitrariness of the game disappears. The game becomes an arena of struggle for prize money and survival. Getting the money and surviving deprives the game of its true meaning. The fact that modern man has brought it a little closer to the playground commodifies the social value of the game (Huizinga, 2021, p. 49).

The dialogues between Gi-hun and Old Uncle emphasise the neighbourhood culture and weakening ties destroyed by capitalist life. There are discourses that the games they played as children have changed and that the neighbourhood culture and children's games of their childhood no longer exist. Old Uncle's "let's be buddies" discourse emphasises that in order to play games, it is necessary to develop certain emotions or bonds in order to enjoy them. As Gi-hun and Old Uncle listen to the announcement about the rules of the game after agreeing to be buddies, Gi-hun is shocked and the threat of death in the game becomes more apparent for him. During the game, Gi-hun takes advantage of Old Uncle's momentary memory loss to deceive him. The desire to win the race and claim the big prize money, combined with the unspeakable fear of the contestants, leads many players to cheat. Feelings of pity and love disappear. Even a husband and wife couple try to win the game at the expense of survival, thus questioning the bonds of marriage. In addition, after the game starts, there are references to the fact that people can cheat as well as make sacrifices. An important message is given by maintaining the gentlemanliness in the game between Sae-byeok and Ji-yeong, two girls who are playmates (Image 12). The fact that these two girls, who experience modern life, become true best friends and show sacrifice in a short time, negates some discourses that have a strong longing for the past and try to maintain their ties. The problem here is not related to traditional or modern culture, but to one's own nature. The fact that Sang-woo and Gi-Hun survive by cheating is a questioning of the problem of "good people" on the play plane.

Gi-Hun's honest and benevolent personality throughout the play is negated when he deceives an old man. He could not display the courage, determination and honesty displayed by Sae-byeok and Ji-yeong.

Gi-hun's cheating in the game can be associated with obligatory expectations as a result of the struggle for survival. In the play, it is emphasised that even the best people can cheat to survive under certain conditions. It is seen that Gi-hun resorts to this way because of her responsibilities such as her daughter and mother. When marbles, a simple children's game, is played under cruel conditions such as death, it is critically shown how human characters change. It is emphasised that an innocent children's game turns into cunning and selfishness under difficult conditions, and an order is formed in which trust disappears. It is stated that the cultural function of the game has changed, moving away from its original purpose and becoming a 'commodity'. This situation contradicts Huizinga's (2021, p.78) statement that "the important thing is the game, not the marbles won". As a result, the function of the games of the past has changed, values such as glory, honour and dignity have lost their importance and only the urge to win and survive has come to the fore.

5.5. Analysis of the *Squid Game* played by adults

Images of Seong Gi-hun (Lee Jung-jae) and Cho Sang-woo (Park Hae-soo) playing the squid game are presented below.

Image 13

Gi-hun and Sang-woo Looking at Each Other



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Image 14

Squid Game in the VIPs' Amors Image



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Image 15

Footage of Gi-hun and Sang-woo Fighting



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Image 16

Footage of Gi-Hun Attacking with a Knife



Kaynak: Dong-hyuk (2021).

Signs: Images from the final scene of the squid play (Images 13, 14, 15, 16)

Signifier: Shots of Gi-hun and Sang-woo turning their childhood game of squid into a life-and-death struggle, with VIPs watching them.

Signified/Denotative Meaning: Gi-hun and Sang-woo are the last two contestants of the squid game. Gi-hun wants to survive and Sang-woo wants to win the prize money. The two

friends fight to the death while the VIPs watch them with pleasure. Only the instinct to kill and the pursuit of profit remain in the game. While Gi-hun tries to hold on to his past ties, Sang-woo breaks these ties for money. For VIPs, the game has become a means of entertainment, with people's lives at stake.

Connotative Meaning: While the squid game was an innocent game played for friendship and fun in childhood, it has turned into a struggle for selfishness, cheating and survival with the influence of the capitalist system. While VIPs see the lives of the lower class as an object of betting and entertainment, it is emphasised how the game has evolved into an unjust order shaped by money and power. A critique of a system in which the game and money further deepen class distinctions and erode people's values is presented.

Two main elements stand out in this game. The first is the VIPs' relationship with the events and their unsatisfied sense of entertainment. VIPs see real people as virtual players in a digital game. The second is the relationship between Gi-hun and Sang-woo, who belong to the lower class, with each other, their values and their childhood. Here, there is no trace of real play; only pleasure and the instinct to kill come to the fore. The necessity of making money and death has distanced Gi-hun and Sang-woo from their own reality. When Gi-hun says, 'We used to play this game a lot when we were kids, do you remember what we said when we passed this?', Sang-woo attacks Gi-hun by saying 'Stop talking nonsense'. Sang-woo shows that he has broken his past ties with his greed for money. Gi-hun responds by cheating because the games they played in the past, friendship and past culture have a value for him. While tying his shoelaces, Gi-hun throws the soil in his palm into Sang-woo's face, throwing him off balance and reminding him of what they called 'secret inspector' in the game as children. The point reached by the two friends is important: Sang-woo's lack of pity for his friend and the fact that his motivation is only to make money shows that the game has turned into a tool. On the other hand, the VIPs' finding the rain after the start of the game 'romantic' reveals the differences in motivation between the players and the game founders.

At the end of the fierce fight, Gi-hun tries to persuade Sang-woo to call off the game, but this is not possible. For Sang-woo, living without money is worse than dying. Before he dies, Sang-woo says: 'When we were kids, we used to play just like this and our mum would call us that dinner was ready, but no one calls us anymore.' These statements, the conversations between the two friends, show that lower class individuals do not lose their values, they just have to adapt to the necessary conditions. While the cultural dimensions and innocence of children's games of the past are reminded with these expressions, it is also emphasised that the cultural function of games has changed irreversibly. Changing world conditions are the biggest obstacle to this transformation and it is understood that the old values and the original functions of the games have been completely lost.

Games bind players together with hidden ties and facilitate social cohesion (Huizinga, 2021). It is understood in the final scene that the players, who try to protect their ties from the past when the game starts, weaken these ties in the later stages of the game and the urge to survive predominates. This situation is important in terms of showing how the sanctity, sincerity and social bonds in the games played in childhood are lost under changing conditions. The fact that the series starts and ends with the squid game turns into an important proposition regarding the changing function of the game. In the visuals above, it is understood that the purpose of the squid game from the perspective of those who play and watch the game has changed over time. The statement 'it was originally a children's game played years ago' given to the question asked by the VIPs about the game is an emphasis on the change in terms of the cultural function of the game. In addition, the fact that VIPs do not know the game reveals class and cultural segregation.

VIPs show that cheating and unfairness in an unfair system is a necessity for survival and profit. The presence of VIPs emphasizes the breakdown of the rules of the game, justice and social order and the

difficulties of survival in these conditions. While VIPs use money as a means to enjoy the game, for the contestant's money is the main goal. Money is the most fundamental commodity that determines power and hierarchy, overriding the games. Money is both the object of desire and the driving force of competition. The fact that the money is hung in the middle of the place where the prisoners sleep stands out as an important metaphor that reinforces these situations.

The social criticism of the series is based on the systematic impoverishment of the middle class in South Korea and beyond. The dystopian call to action of the survival genre deciphers the changing functions of childhood play for individuals trapped in a stratified social system in which the few have much and the many have little in an attempt to correct the asymmetrical distribution of wealth and power. Children's games have turned into a space of life and struggle for those in the lower class, while they have turned into a function of entertainment for those in the upper class. Real bodies have been transformed into computer games and simulated for the rich. For VIPs, the life of the lower class is a field of betting and entertainment; those who die are just a fading light on the digital screen. The game now has a multi-layered meaning and function for both those who play and those who watch. For the contestants, the game is a pendulum swinging between life and death; for the VIPs, it is an object of pleasure, entertainment and gambling that can be solved through the death of people. Only a few VIPs are the subjects; the others are seen as tools and objects in the struggle for survival. The game has become a tool and the players an object. The ties to the past have changed with the prominence of money as a necessary tool. It is shown that the ties with the past are broken between those who have access to money and those who do not, and people's values are eroded. This erosion is revealed in the dialogues between Gi-hun and Il-nam in the final scene.

5.6. Analysing the meaning and function of the game

In the dialogues between Gi-hun and Il-Nam towards the end of the last episode of the series, an allegory is presented about how the meaning of childhood games has been lost. Gi-hun cannot believe what he sees and hears. He is unwilling or unable to accept that the Squid Game's unimaginable capital flows have no deeper justification than entertainment. After all, Gi-hun and 455 others have become interchangeable, utilised and ultimately dead objects for the 'entertainment' of these privileged few subjects.

Il-Nam asks the question 'do you know what someone who has no money has in common with someone who has a lot of money?' to which Il-Nam replies: "It's no fun for them to live", "fun" is identified with a lost entity projected into childhood, "When I was a child", Il-Nam continues, "I used to have so much fun with my friends that no matter what I did, I would forget time. I wanted to feel the same way once more before I died". In this childlike search for 'fun' that destroys time, Il-Nam emphasizes that he is trying to feel something by participating in the game. Il-Nam continues to speak 'you can never feel as a spectator if you are a spectator'. For Il-Nam, even 'seeing with your own eyes' is not 'real' or 'fun' or not 'fun' enough, as long as he cannot participate in the play himself. The desire for direct access to an unmediated content/being has never been so clearly manifested. Here Il-Nam's statements reveal the true function and value of the game.

Gi-Hun asks Il-Nam, "Why did you join the game?" Il-Nam replied: "When I was a child, I used to have so much fun, no matter what I did with my friends, I couldn't lose track of time. I wanted to experience the same feeling one more time before I died. I couldn't experience that feeling as a spectator watching the play. I wanted to experience that feeling". These statements of Il-Nam reveal the true motive of enjoyment in the nature of the play. Gi-hun asks a question to understand the true meaning of the play: "Did it feel good?" Il-Nam replies: "You asked why I left you alive. Because it was fun to play games with you. Thanks to you, I remembered things in my past that I had forgotten long ago. It has been a long time since I had that much fun". These dialogues provide an important inference about the real meaning and function of the game. The transformation of the game, which the children played with great pleasure

and fun in the first episode of the series, into a commodity value with the mediating role of money in the adult world represents an allegorical transformation. However, *Squid Game* may not have the same meaning for everyone. For example, for Il-Nam, who has no monetary purpose, the game finds its true meaning. For Gi-hun, although the meaning and function of the games he played as a child has not changed, its meaning has changed due to the conditions of participation in the game. Because Gi-hun did not participate in the game just for fun; he struggled to survive in this game throughout his life and displayed behaviors that contradicted some of his values in this process. While in many cultures, games continue to exist as an area where values integrated with life are maintained, for the 455 players in the series, earning money has lost its meaning by turning into an expression of a selfish feeling.

6. Conclusion

This article analyses the changing function of play in the TV series *Squid Game*. Starting from the squid game played by children, the series reveals how the real function of the game has been transformed. Moreover, it is seen that the series has become a culture industry phenomenon by reflecting the social and cultural structure. The products of the games in the series have become an economic element related to culture by gaining value in market areas (Siregar et al., 2021). *Squid Game*, while deepening the inequality between rich and poor, also undertakes a function that increases the profit margin with high viewing rates. In this context, the relationship between children's games and culture in the series is important in terms of the changing functions of the game and reflecting the cultural processes of the society. It can be evaluated as a dialectical process that games are a phenomenon influenced by and affecting culture. The games in the series do not remain only as children's games; on the contrary, they take on a structure that the rich use as a means of entertainment and gambling, while the poor struggle to survive.

The games in the series have reached a metaphorical level that reveals how the modern capitalist system objectifies individuals and erodes cultural values from a past where childhood innocence and social bonds are emphasized. The game 'Red Light, Green Light' in the series reveals how it is instrumentalised by the capitalist system and economic difficulties and how its cultural functions are lost. It is revealed that when the real function and mandatory conditions of the game are changed, the voluntariness, pleasure, fun and enjoyment of the game disappear and thus the real function of the game is lost. This change of meaning and function in games is also shown in other games. However, the Dalgona/umbrella game is more than just a simple entertainment, it also deals with various sociocultural and psychological themes. The Dalgona game shows that the relationship with joy during childhood has changed, childhood innocence has been lost and games no longer have the same meaning. This transformation in the series symbolises how life is hardened by hardships and economic pressures and how people lose their innocence. The fact that the players have to deceive each other in order to survive emphasizes that human nature can become selfish and prioritize its own interests under compulsory conditions. The games embody the influence of different cultural elements on people. For example, when Dalgona chooses the shapes of the game, Ali's comparison of the circle to the moon in his hometown reveals how cultural awareness and personal connections play a role in the game. This emphasizes the connection between universal and local features of the game.

As the function and meaning of games change throughout the series, this process is also shown in relation to the experiences of the players' childhood. Gi-hun and Il-nam's dialogues about their childhood recall the loss of neighbourhood culture and the increase of individuality in modern life. On the other hand, while VIPs see the game as a means of entertainment and gambling, for the players it turns into a field of struggle to earn money and survive. In the final scene of the series, in response to Il-nam's desire to re-experience the pure fun of his childhood, the meaning of the game turns into money and struggle. This transformation critically highlights how VIPs objectify players and how economic hardship affects the moral values of individuals. The following can be said about the games in relation to this.

- Although the games in the series initially seem like innocent games played in childhood, it is shown how they are transformed into a struggle for power and survival within the capitalist system.
- Games such as 'Red Light, Green Light' and 'Dalgona/umbrella' show how the meaning and function of games played cheerfully in childhood change under compulsory (economic) conditions.
- The games symbolise how the capitalist order makes individuals selfish and self-interested, and criticise the breakdown of social ties and the weakening of trust.
- The class distinction between the VIPs and the players shows that the rich see the games only as a means of entertainment, while the poor try to survive through these games.
- The cultural ties and social functions of the games in the series are shown to have weakened and lost their meaning due to the individualisation and competitiveness of modern life. This situation is embodied in the dialogues between Il-nam and Gi-hun. In the plays, by reminding the lost values of the neighbourhood culture and children's games of the past, the modern world where individualism increases and social ties weaken is criticised.
- Gi-hun and Sang-woo's struggle in moral contradictions reveals that individuals can lose their moral values to survive under the capitalist system.

As a result, *Squid Game* offers an allegory that deeply criticizes the injustices, violence and corruption of individuals in modern capitalist society, starting from the innocence of children's games. While the initial natural and fun structure of the games is disrupted by capitalist pressures and economic difficulties, the struggle of the players in the series to survive reveals the complexity of human nature and how society/individuals are corrupted. The series reveals social inequalities, the objectification of individuals and the destructive effects of the competitive structure of the modern world on human relations and moral values.

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