

# Can Squid Game Series Be Watched Through Social Darwinism? A Semiotic Review

Squid Game Dizisi Sosyal Darwinizm Üzerinden İzlenebilir Mi? Göstergebilimsel Bir  
İnceleme

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## Abstract

Social events are reflected as a string of signs in the language of the productions in question by forming the subjects of cinema and TV productions. The language of expression in television creates a dream world, and the message is tried to be placed in the audience's mind in the form of images. This study discusses whether the *South Korean* production *Squid Game*, which has recently reached a significant audience, can be watched through *Social Darwinism*. In the research, the exploitation of the efforts and hopes of the weak by the strong was analyzed within the framework of *Social Darwinism*. Social Darwinism is adapting Darwin's theory of Evolution, which is valid in all species, to the social field. This theory asserts that the fittest for the environment can survive in competition between individual organisms. Social Darwinism postulates that competition between individuals, groups, or nations causes the social Evolution of human societies. The competition, which started as a group in the TV series *Squid Game*, continues with individual competition and is represented by the survival of the one who finally overcomes all these challenging competitive conditions. The semiotic method was used in the research due to its suitability for the subject's purpose, context, and basic research question. The sample of the study was determined according to the purposive sampling technique. The research data consists of scenes and player expressions reflecting the Social Darwinism perspective of the visual and verbal expressions in the series. Research findings show that the evolutionary laws among living things continue in social life in the form of *Social Darwinism*.

**Keywords:** Social Darwinism, Squid Game, Racial Hygiene, Consent Production, Bio-Power.

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## Öz

Toplumsal olaylar sinema ve TV yapımlarının konularını oluşturarak söz konusu yapımların dilinde göstergeler dizgesi halinde yansıtılır. Televizyon yapımlarındaki anlatım dili düş dünyası yaratmak şeklindedir ve ve iletilmek istenen mesaj izleyicinin zihnine imgeler halinde yerleştirilmeye çalışılır. Bu çalışmada son dönemlerde önemli izleyici kitlesine ulaşan Güney Kore yapımı *Squid Game* adlı dizinin Sosyal Darwinizm üzerinden izlenip izlenilemeyeceğinin tartışılması amaçlanmaktadır. Araştırmada güçlülerin, zayıfların emeklerini ve umutlarını istismar etmeleri, *Sosyal Darwinizm* çerçevesinde analiz edilmiştir. *Sosyal Darwinizm*, Darwin'in bütün türlerde geçerli olan evrim kuramının sosyal alana uyarlanmış halidir. Bu kuram bireysel organizmalar arasındaki rekabette, çevreye en uygun olanın varlığını devam ettirebileceğini ileri sürer. *Sosyal Darwinizm*, bireyler, gruplar veya uluslar arasındaki rekabetin insan topluluklarının sosyal evrimine neden olduğunu varsayar. *Squid Game* adlı dizide grup halinde başlayan rekabet bireysel rekabetle devam etmekte ve en sonunda bütün bu zorlu rekabet koşullarının üstesinden gelenin varlığını devam ettirmekle temsil edilmektedir. Araştırmada konunun amacına, bağlamına ve temel araştırma sorusuna uygunluğu nedeniyle göstergibilimsel yöntem kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın örnekleme amaçsal örnekleme tekniğine göre belirlenmiştir. Araştırmanın verilerini dizideki görsel ve sözlü ifadelerin *Sosyal Darwinizm* perspektifini yansıtan sahneler ve oyuncu ifadeleri oluşturmaktadır. Araştırma bulguları canlılar arasında varolan evrimsel yasaların toplumsal yaşamda *Sosyal Darwinizm* şeklinde devam ettiğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sosyal Darwinizm, Squid Game, Irksal Hijyen, Rıza Üretimi, Biyo-İktidar.

## Introduction

In some television productions, it is known that the connotations of the message are conveyed to niche audiences. The inability of people to participate in social life with their efforts without the need for another tool is an important social problem (Cho, 2017; Rudman & Saud, 2020; Sugarman & Thrift, 2019; Williams, 2002, p. 7). It is seen that there is a constant situation of injustice, no matter how one looks at the basis of the mentioned social problems. Does the phenomenon of justice express what is for the benefit of humanity, or is it applied as “justice is what comes to mind,” as Plato says (Cho, 2017; Şen, 2018). The answers to these and similar questions can be easily given in societies by looking at numerical indicators. Unfair practices produce results that justify the metaphor of *Social Darwinism* (Schuch, 2017, p. 609). The problems mentioned here have been handled in various ways and transferred to the symbolic language of film productions. In this study, the *South Korean* TV series *Squid Game*, which reached a significant audience (142 million people in 94 countries), was analyzed through *Social Darwinism*. It is essential to dwelling on the serial subject's connotations to express the social reality.

The fact that the history of humanity is a history of war, in general, leads to the emergence of works on war. These works include different art productions from literature to law, philosophy to psychology, sociology to biology, and cinema to TV productions (Halewood & Morgan-Owen, 2020; Vushko, 2018). People face the different face of war today, as they have throughout history. War is practiced roughly in relatively underdeveloped societies, while it is practiced in a more refined manner through the production of consent in developed societies. In developed societies, on the other hand, another war continues in the form of “bio-power” overexploited bodies, as conceptualized

by Foucault (Foucault, 2003; Takács, 2017). The problem is whether it is applied in its rough form, consent production, or bio-power. As in every social action, the issue has economic, social, cultural, political, and political aspects.

The visuals analyzed in this study are presented with Barthes' (1990) denotation and connotation analysis. The subjects covered in the series were problematized based on the theory of *Social Darwinism*. In this way, it is aimed to draw attention to the injustices, inequalities, and "bio-power" established on human bodies whose exploited rights are not sustainable today. In this way, it is aimed to reach a meaningful whole with linguistic and non-linguistic sign systems. The research's main question was whether the TV series *Squid Game* could be watched through *Social Darwinism*. The research also aims to answer the following sub-questions:

- *How are human lives represented in the state of nature?*
- *How is the issue of social inequality represented in the series?*

In the visual and written codes examined within the scope of the study, Social Darwinism was generally criticized over economic and social inequalities. When visuals are evaluated in terms of connotation, the myth that neoliberal fiction only serves the interests of a minimal group is encountered. The findings obtained from the study have concluded that Social Darwinist assumptions support the social and economic inequality created by the *Neoliberal Order*. In the series, the weak, who form the basis of society, are represented by negative metaphors such as greed, ruthlessness, and ruthlessness (Boz, 2020; Witera et al., 2021). The fact that practices such as "racial hygiene" produced by Social Darwinism, which feeds on income inequality, have caused great disasters to humanity is brought to the attention of large masses of people with the *Squid Game* series (Karasu & Çoker, 2018; Wessels et al., 2018). The search for a life based on social democracy, social justice, freedom, and universal human rights, which is on the horizon of humanity today, is successfully represented in the series.

### **Conceptual Framework: Social Darwinism**

The "theory of Evolution," systematized by Charles Darwin, impacted many branches of science and philosophical approaches, especially biology. According to Darwin, living species evolve and acquire different characteristics by undergoing genetic changes from generation to generation (Ellegård, 1990; Oldroyd, 1986). As living things move away from their common ancestors, their diversity increases, and the evolutionary process continues with mechanisms such as "natural selection," "mutation," "genetic drift," and "genetic hitchhiking" (Yoshino, 2017; Welkart, 2021). According to Darwin's Theory of Evolution, there is an endless struggle for survival in nature, and due to this struggle, those who adapt survive. The theory of Evolution, systematized by Darwin, was brought to the social world by Spencer with the metaphor of *Social Darwinism*. For Spencer, the struggle for scarce resources is inevitable, even beneficial. At the end of this struggle, social progress takes place. Social progress slows down when there is no competition in social life. Influenced by Social Darwinism, the economist successfully adapted the Marshall Theory of Evolution principles to the discipline of economics (Kabaş, 2017; Skousen, 2014, p. 235-237; O'Connell & Ruse, 2021).

According to Marshall, economics is a positive science like natural sciences, and the natural selection continues in this field, whose conditions are determined by the powerful.

According to the socio-biological theory expressed in *Social Darwinism*, history and social relations are regulated by the struggle for survival between people and societies. Therefore, wars, imperialism, and colonialism are integral parts of the struggle for the existence of societies. In this scene of struggle, individuals are divided into three: those who have the ability and who use it, those who have the ability but do not use it, and those who do not. When communities of these characteristics come together, a social hierarchy is formed. This hierarchical structure continues in a cycle of the extinction of the weak and the exclusion of the powerful from social life by the stronger (Genç, 2007; Richter, 2000; Tracy, 2002, p. 27). In this cycle of constant conflict, called *Social Darwinism*, evolutionary differences exist between species in nature and human races. This thought led to the birth of fascist ecology.

The application of *Social Darwinism* in the field has been in the form of the “eugenic movement.” The practice of eugenics aims to improve the human race by removing disabled and sick people from society and reproducing healthy individuals. It is aimed that human beings direct their Evolution through eugenics (Atkind, 2008; Radick, 2019). This idea is derived from Darwin’s “natural selection” theory, which asserts that living things evolve through natural selection. With the developments in the genetic field, two different types of eugenics have been identified: One of them is “positive eugenics,” and it is suggested that people of a good race should reproduce among themselves. “Negative eugenics,” on the other hand, is the prevention of reproducing those not of the superior race (Davis, 2008; Dearborn, 2019; Challenger, 2005). In the struggle for survival, large masses are victimized by artificial selection or negative eugenics. Social Darwinism sees negative and positive eugenics as necessary for social progress based on this constant war phenomenon. *Social Darwinism* proposes supporting strong individuals and excluding weak ones from the system in natural selection for social development (İbrahim, 2021). According to *Social Darwinism*, there is no ethics or law in the “state of nature.” In the state of nature, everything is legitimate regarding human survival. Hobbes’s metaphor of “Man is the wolf of man” expresses this. The reflection of the assumption that man is the wolf of other people in the field of economy, the motto “let them do it, let them pass” constitutes the basic understanding of *Neoliberalism*.

Neoliberalism offers an ideological framework based on social inequality by imposing “free market” principles on every aspect of life (Antoniazzi, 2018). According to the neoliberal thinker Hayek, market civilization emerges as a complex structure due to evolutionary development. The instrumental rationality of the human mind does not have a structure to understand the complexity of its operations. Hayek advocated this view as “evolutionary rationalism” (Derya et al., 2015; Fırat & Kurtoğlu, 2014; İbrahim, 2021). Neoliberal economists could foresee that free-market ideology would favor the strong and be against the weak due to people’s conflict-prone, rational, and self-interested nature. In the global process, the positive or negative manipulation of individuals and masses in the triangle of genetics-psychology-neurology deepens the power imbalance in question (Fırat & Kurtoğlu, 2014). It shows that evolutionary processes in the development of financial services in the historical process of Neoliberalism take place in the financial and natural worlds. Financial

history results from institutional change and natural selection (Ferguson, 2011, p. 281). Today, the USA implements “Commercial Darwinism” on a world scale within the framework of the practice of *Social Darwinism* (Gardner, 2004).

Beyond arguing that the fittest survive in an individualistic social order, *Social Darwinism* advocates a kind of racial hygiene in which states direct human improvement through eugenics (Leonard, 2005, p. 214). According to these elitists, powerful nations are made up of influential white people to expand their empires. It is the law of nature that only white nations use every means to consolidate their power. As a result, *Social Darwinism* continues to be used as an intellectual tool to justify the exploitation of “lesser races” by so-called “superior races” in the new era of imperialism (Sezgin, 2002; Wessels et al., 2018). In this research, *Social Darwinism* offers a practical intellectual framework for analyzing the topics covered in the series.

### **Representation of Social Darwinism in the Squid Game Series**

In productions reflecting *Social Darwinist* views, aggressive individualism and group dynamics are often criticized. The TV series *Squid Game* has criticized this situation with deep references and strong images. In the *Squid Game* series, the main idea is to support the strong individuals, which is the crucial point of *Social Darwinism*, and move the weak individuals out of the system. Malthusian emphasis on the need for competition for survival is given comprehensive coverage in *Social Darwinian* works. In the works in question, it is argued that the poor should meet their own needs and that showing mercy to them will lead to social weakness (Gaudet, 2017; Yoshino, 2017, pp. 4019-433). In all the six games fictionalized in the series, the assumption that “the one who adapts best to the environment survives,” put forward by the theory of Evolution, is handled. “Racial hygiene,” in the form of Social Darwinism that no mercy should be shown to the losers, is represented in the series as individual hygiene and group hygiene.

The main argument of Social Darwinists is that race must be preserved to succeed in the struggle for survival (Buhton, 2020; Jin, 2022). This assumption is represented by scenes of eliminating the weak in the *Squid Game* series. In the 6th episode of the series, people are asked to group in pairs for a random game selection. Players choose their partners and encounter a situation they did not expect. In the first minutes of the game, there is a great shock in the groups. While the players think they will compete with other groups, each duo will compete within themselves. After getting over this shock, players stuck between life and death instincts are left with a situation where they have no choice but to eliminate their partner to survive.

One of the main themes emphasized in the series is that people have no choice but to reveal their bodies to survive due to income inequality. Famous businessman Rockefeller used Darwin's concept of natural selection to explain the monopolistic practices he implemented on exploited workers. Likewise, Sumner's claim that social progress depends on the existence of “the most suitable families” who transfer their wealth and genetic characteristics to their children, and therefore a line of superior citizens should be formed, reflected the assumptions of *Social Darwinism* in the economic field (Başaran, 2021; Reich, 2005). Attempting to explain economic inequalities through the theory

of Evolution raises the problem of the sustainability of governments based on the misery of the masses. The other side of the case is that humans have a suitable genetic predisposition for fierce competition. Studies such as the Stanford Prison Experiment have shown how brutal people can become when appropriate conditions are provided. All this suggests the concept of “conatus,” which Spinoza uses to express the basic tendency of man. Conatus: existence means the struggle for the tendency to exist. According to Spinoza, a person strives to do whatever needs to be done to survive (Grigoropoulou, 2018; Zhao, 2021). The world in which the tendency of living things to survive is a world free of ethical principles.

## **Representation of Social Darwinism in Cinema and TV Productions**

As in many disciplines, *Social Darwinism* is conveyed to large audiences through film productions. Cinema and TV deal with events and phenomena related to human life, *Social Darwinism*, or other ongoing wars. The subject of war is scripted and brought to the attention of the masses based on solid theoretical foundations such as the psychoanalyst or evolution theory (Lehtonen, 2020; Zihang, 2020). These works reveal what a person can risk in the struggle for existence in his will to live.

Films on Evolution and *Social Darwinism* in cinema and TV productions can be considered in two ways; the first is directly related to Evolution, and the other is *Social Darwinism*. One of these, directly related to Evolution, is the movie *Le Guerre de Feu*, produced by Annaud. The film deals with the years when homo sapiens and Neanderthal humans lived together (Gürbüz, 2019). The Creation, produced by Jon Amiel, focuses on Darwin’s problems as a human being while writing the theory of Evolution (Mikail, 2020). Ron Fricke’s Baraka movie tells the place of humans as homo sapiens in the evolution process (Alan, 2019). *Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey* presents the Evolution of humanity with philosophical and artistic content (Sunal, 2021). The story of Rupert Wyatt’s movie *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* is based on Evolution and genetics (Oğuz, 2020). Mike Cahill’s movie *I Origins* deals with the issue that the entire body did not form simultaneously during the evolution process, and those different organs evolved differently (Doğan, 2021).

One of the main works dealing with the central theme of *Social Darwinism* is *Hunger Games*. Directed and scripted by Gary Ross, the film was adapted from the novel of the same name by Suzanne Collins (Şen, 2018). Released in 2002 and kicking off *Chan Wook Park’s Revenge Trilogy*, *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* is a social Darwinist film with deep philosophical references (Staley & Walsh 2018). Oscar-winner Bong Joon-ho’s film *Snowpiercer* contains a strong neoliberal critique, political discourse, and philosophical approaches (Yaşartürk, 2021). The movie *The Platform* reflects philosophical solid and political content and class conflict into the language of cinema with shocking metaphors (Akmeşe, 2021). The movie *The Parasite*, which recently won four Oscars in different fields, tells the story of the “Kim family,” who have developed street intelligence, risking everything to survive and change their class, against the “Park family,” which displays a classic representation of ancestral wealth. In all these films, the argument that the weakness presented as a threat to racial hygiene, which is the critical argument of *Social Darwinism*, threatens the whole society (Kaçar, 2021).

## Method

### Semiotic Design

Semiotics aims to reveal the meanings of linguistic and non-linguistic sign systems. This way, it examines how meaning is produced by articulating signs, narratives, or texts (Guiraud, 2016, p. 17). In semiotic research, a sign is any form, object, or phenomenon that represents something outside of itself and can take the place of what it represents. There are “signs” based on semiotics; the sign is everything reflected and seen (Berger, 2010, p. 103; Fiske, 2017, p. 122). Indicators consist of the combination of the signifier (expression) and the signified (content) planes (Rifat, 2013, p. 97; Rifat, 2014, p. 22). While analyzing the indicators aims to reveal their connotative meanings and the relational meaning between the indicator, the signifier, and the signified (Guiraud, 2016, p. 39; Tutar & Erdem, 2020, p. 356). While the signifier expresses the universal meaning of the signs, it reveals the implicit meanings intended to be given in the message shown. The signified finds its true meaning in culture, so the meaning of the signified is conventional (Rifat, 2013). This research has tried to reach the central theme, the signified, by evaluating the visual indicators and symbols.

There are different approaches to semiotics. In this study, Barthes’ semiotic approach was preferred because it focuses on how the visual message is perceived and interpreted. The concepts of “denotation” (signifier) and “connotation” (signified) have a central place based on Barthes’s understanding of semiotics, which focuses on associations (Yücel, 2015, p. 283). In this approach, denotation is related to who and what is said and shown, while connotation relates to how what is said and shown is presented (Barthes, 2015, p. 47; Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 94). In Barthes’ approach, the connotation is related to ideology and “myth,” Barthes uses “myth.” The sign is handled in the context of the signifier and the signified, and the primary purpose here is to produce the “meta-language” (Barthes, 1990, p. 24). Barthes dwells on three different planes, concentrating on meaning and signification: sign, signifier, and signified. Denotation constitutes the first level of signification in which myths are formed, and connotation constitutes the second level (Fiske, 2017, p. 116). The connotation of the visual sign in semiotics reveals itself with the deep semantic codes of the culture (Fiske, 2017, p. 185). In this research, visual encodings and their symbolic and imaginary meanings in the TV series *Squid Game* were searched for the message the film wanted to convey. In this way, it is aimed to divide the meaning into its constituent elements by subjecting all kinds of signs in the series to “multiple reading.”

### Sample of the Research

The general universe of this study consists of all films dealing with *Social Darwinism*. Due to the difficulty of examining the movies in the universe, the *Squid Game* series, which was determined using the purposeful sampling method, constitutes the research sample. The main reason for considering the *Squid Game* series in the study is that the broad masses of the public embrace the topics covered by the series, and the topic is topicality and prevalence. Some series sequences were excluded from the study because they were unsuitable for analysis within the framework of *Social*

*Darwinism* and did not carry connotative messages. Twenty-one visuals determined within the scope of the study were analyzed by the semiotic analysis method.

### **Analysis of Data and Findings**

Meaning-making in movies is handled in two aspects: the plane of events and the plane of form. Elements that make sense on the plane of events are physical appearance, play, costume and makeup, landscaping, accessories, and natural light. At the level of form, the elements that make up meaning are examined in terms of shooting format, focal length, shooting scale, special image effects, editing, and camera angle (Monaco, 2010, p. 153; Rabiger, 2007, p. 534). Bartes mentions four different shooting scales, in which shooting scales function as signifiers (Berger, 1993, p. 35). The first is a close-up. It covers the area from the top of the head to the navel. A medium shot is between the waist and knee (Brown, 2008, p. 16). The general shooting scale is the shooting scale that corresponds to the average viewing distance of a person in daily life. On the other hand, long shooting allows framing the person or object completely by isolating it from other objects or persons (Jewitt & Oyama, 2008, p. 146). In the research, the meanings of visual language were analyzed through inflection scales (Armstrong & Wilcox, 2007, p. 7; Avgerinou & Pettersson, 1994, p. 6). This study analyzed the message given over the determined indicators over the shooting scales. The shot scale reflects the way the person or object in front of the camera is seen in the frame. Shooting scales and shooting angles are used to reinforce body language. Shooting scales are used to increase the audience's effect and are examined in four groups. These are long, medium, close, and general shots. (Berger, 1993, p. 35; Küneçen, 2008, p. 15; Türkgeldi, 2016, p. 105).

#### **Tag of *Squid Game* Series**

**Genre:** Action, Thriller, Drama

**Author:** Hwang Dong-hyuk

**Screenwriter:** Hwang Dong-hyuk

**Director:** Hwang Dong-hyuk

**Cast:** Lee Jung-Jae, Park Hae-soo, Wi Ha-Joon, Jung Ho-Yeon, O Yeong-su, Heo Sung-Tae, Anupam Tripathi, Kim Joo-ryoung,

**Composer:** Jung Jae-il

**Country:** South Korea

**Language:** Korean

**Season:** 1

**Number of episodes:** 9

**Image 1.** Korean Promotion Poster of Squid Game Series



([https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squid\\_Game](https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squid_Game))

The effort to “generate consent” in the series is repeated by putting people in trouble and leaving them in a problematic situation with indirect traps. The production of consent is represented in the series by the banker (usurer) Oh Il Nam’s character’s justification of the seduction process as “I did not force anyone to play the game.” Also, in the series, “life is like a game, it has many actors; If you do not play with them, they will play with you,” legitimizes this situation. Another important issue addressed in the series is social and economic inequality. This situation is represented by striking scenes in the series where people have similar conditions not to live but to die.

**Image 2**



**Image 3**



**Image 4**



It is understood that the primary purpose of the people depicted in designing the game in the series is to create a disciplined and obedient mass under the control of the ruling classes through mass indoctrination. They aimed to manipulate the subconscious of the masses toward the New World Order, which expresses the imposition of the strategies of rich countries produced in line with neoliberal policies on – -world countries and gives a new order to these countries. The connotation of everyone being in uniforms in the series indicates oppression, authority, and hierarchy. The order created by the totalitarian structure that oppresses large groups of people today is depicted in Figure 2. In Visual 3, it is given the impression that people participate in the games voluntarily. This

situation is represented by the production of consent and having people sign “consent forms” to not be responsible for the consequences. A game whose rules are determined by the strong ones first starts with “consent production.” In the series, the illusion of production of consent is represented by the impression that people are participating in the game of their own will. The answer to the question of the cost of not complying with all this fictional order is given in the first stage of the game, “Green Light Red Light.” It is represented by visual four that those who do not comply with the authority will be ruthlessly eliminated. In these scenes, the message is that those who do not comply with the totalitarian New World Order rules will be “eliminated.” Actor Jang Deok-su’s line “this is hell, there are no rules in hell” also expresses this situation.

**Table 1.** Analysis of Indicators

Images	Sign	Signifier	Signified
Image 2	uniform, attendant	order-giver, command-command	Totalitarian and authoritarian order, authority, oppression, and hierarchy.
Image 3	People, consent form	Desperate people, Do not sign	Victims of the system, production of consent, improper seduction.
Image 4	Blood	Horror	Vulnerability, intimidation to death, no choice but to die or be killed
Shooting scale	Second and third images, long shot	decor and person context,	space, public distance
	fourth image close shot	Only face.	Sincerity, horror, fear.

In Table 1, the functioning of a totalitarian and authoritarian order is reflected in the distant shooting. Here, the players are not individuals, but just game material is reflected by a number given to each of them instead of their names. It reflects the status quo, authority, oppression, and hierarchy that is tried to be shown throughout the series. Victims of the system find themselves in a game of death by the production of consent. Creating a security problem creates the perception that protecting the status quo will be in their interest. This sequence aimed to reflect people’s desperation by using the distance shooting scale in the second and third images. Presenting the objects on the stage to the audience from a distant perspective is aimed at the audience to evaluate the context and the event together. In this way, it is aimed that the audience will be affected by the size of the event. The fourth visual aimed to make the audience feel the horror, fear, and anxiety with the close-up. The narrative power of the story was tried to be increased by using cinematographic narrative elements with close-ups and camera angles. Here, it is aimed at the audience to feel the psychological states experienced by the actor. Close-up is preferred in the second and third images as it strengthens the meaning and increases the feeling of fear and anxiety over the villain (Bouse, 2010, p. 123 Penney, 1995).

In the images below, various images are related to the functioning of the totalitarian order. A tree with branches extending all over, an innocent-faced but ruthless killing machine standing in front of the tree is seen. There are helpless people in a prone position with the totalitarian system administrator in front of the screen, which gives the impression that he is watching everyone, like the “big brother” emphasized in George Orwell’s 1984 dystopian novel.

Image 5



Image 6



Image 7



In Figure 5, artificial intelligence detects and kills people who do not obey the red and green light game rules. The death machine is represented by a heartless “artificial intelligence” to imply that no mercy will be shown to those who do not obey the system established here. The tree with its branches or arms stretched out in all directions, shown behind the killing machine, shows that nothing in the series is just that. The system administrator, who does not show his face in front of the screen, implying that the people below are not worthy of seeing his face, is presented with the panopticon metaphor. On the other hand, the fact that salvation from the system is not possible either by force or begging is represented by the position of prostration (Picture 7). What is shown here is that there is no other way to survive than to die and kill. These scenes clearly emphasize “social hygiene” and “Social Darwinism.”

Table 2. Analysis of Indicators

Images	Sign	Signifier	Signified
Image 5	tree, killing machine	Reaching out, artificial intelligence	Panopticon/Totalitarian and authoritarian system, ruthless and clever construction of death.
Image 6	sitting person	The administrator of the system.	Sovereign will, the impression that everything is under control.
Image 7	Group of people, prone position	Mass/mass pleading and invocation	Absence of group dynamics and consciousness, a dry crowd, and no other way but to die and kill.
Shooting scale	fifth and sixth images Close shot	Only face	Facial expressions and emotions.
	7. image long shot	Decor and People	Public Relationship

In the authoritarian systems that are tried be shown throughout the series, the individual does not make any sense, and he does not have the quality of being an individual. This situation is tried to be symbolized by a panopticon-like structure. In addition, clever death techniques in authoritarian systems show how dangerous authoritarian systems can be according to their place. Clever death patterns reflect the ability of authoritarian systems to generate fear and terror. The sovereign will, which does not leave any autonomous space for the individual in the authoritarian system, which is caricatured by the panopticon, reflects the power of the individual to enter the private space whenever he wishes.

The fifth and sixth images preferred the chest shot (Medium Close). This shot shows the top of the chest area. The main purpose here is to show the situation experienced by more than one player

in the same frame. The chest shot, where the person’s entire chest and the top can be seen in the frame, is aimed that the viewer is realizing the person’s relationship with the space. The decor and the people’s context are in the far shot. The relationship between the actors and the field was intended to be shown to the audience. With the distance shooting scale, all sides of the area were shown, emphasizing the helplessness of people. In addition, the objects on the stage are presented to the audience from a distant perspective, and it is aimed at the audience to evaluate the context together.

In the images below, the desperate crying of people with nothing but their devalued bodies, the sitting man who has lost his status and dignity, and the money globe obtained through speculation and symbolizing surplus value are imaginatively reflected.

**Image 8**

**Image 9**

**Image 10**



In countries where capitalism is applied in its crudest form, people’s life is financialized. In these societies, people borrow money, take risks, pay installments, etc. The individual’s life is programmed into the vicious circle of “pay the debts and pay the debts and die.” As Sennet puts it, in neoliberal capitalism, “the winner takes it all, the loser loses everything; there is no middle ground” (Sennet, 2010, p. 43). In the eighth and ninth visuals above, there are representations of the people without tomorrow who have lost everything. The only way to survive is to obey the rules set by the sovereign will. The situation that Foucault describes as “bio-power, “ built on the bodies of desperate people of a raging minority, is successfully represented in the series.

**Table 3.** Analysis of Indicators

Images	Sign	Signifier	Signified
Image 8	crying person	helplessness and despair	A person without a future who cries for his helplessness
Image 9	Two people	Two people whose destinies intersect	People with nothing to lose but their bodies are desperately looking for a way out.
Image 10	money globe	Symbol of power	Capital: the coagulated state of sovereign will and human blood.
Shooting scale	Image 8 Close-up	Only face	Facial expressions and emotions.
	Image 9, medium shot	Body most	Personal relationship
	Images 10 Extreme Close Up	whole body.	Fear, horror, excitement, enthusiasm.

In Table 3, the audience closely reflects the psychological state of a person who cries in desperation and has no future. It aims to increase the impact of the dramatic situation on the audience, where people are desperately looking for a way out of their situation. In addition, it is emphasized that capital is behind all these evils with very close and detailed shots.

In the eighth image, a close-up scale was preferred to create a more substantial effect on the viewer. The ninth image aimed to bring the audience closer to the event by taking the upper part of the actor's body in the middle shot. Medium shots, which often have an important place in themed films, emphasize the relationship between the inner world and the person's outer world. In the tenth image, in a very close-up shot, the fact that money symbolizes capital is strongly expressed. It was aimed to create an unreal effect in the images with close-ups. It is desired to zoom the image with the depth of focus and increase the reality of the visible (Bazin, 2011, p. 50).

In the images below, one of the system elements, based on exploiting people's hopes, tries to persuade his victim through "hope dealership." In other images, there are striking metaphors of "bio-power" built on the bodies of devalued people who are willing to do anything to participate in the game and have nothing but their bodies.

Image 11



Image 12



Image 13



The main message emphasized by the plot of the series is that people's survival depends on others' death. The blue card in Figure 11 above represents hope, and the red represents elimination. The slap scene in Visual 12 represents the bio-power established over the body in exchange for money. The fact that those who set the rules of the game are so immoral as not to obey the rules they set is represented by the symbolic scene in visual 13. In the game, Seong Gi-Hun represents the majority who have to adapt to the system, even if they do not want to. Seong is a former worker who organized and even participated in the strike. This is a mismatch that the system will not forgive, and Seong is an outcast. Cho Sang-woo, aka actor 218, is a professional who graduated from Seoul University's School of Business. He is a white-collar who found himself at the bottom because he could not control the risks when he was a "playmaker."

Table 4. Analysis of Indicators

Images	Sign	Signifier	Signified
Image 11	sarcastic smile, well-groomed person	Confidence, representation of status	Inappropriate temptation, consent generation, siding with the quarterback, and power.

Image 12	blue and red card	hope and despair	A desperate attempt to get out of the pit he is in.
Image 13	Slap, hand blocking	Domination, the show of power, an attempt to unravel identity,	Transferring control over the body to someone else to keep the body alive, bio-power is established over the body.
Shooting scale	Images 11, 12, and 13 medium shot	Body most	Personal relationship

Totalitarian and authoritarian order is represented with an emphasis on authority, oppression, and hierarchy. The system's victims are seduced through the production of consent, thus maintaining the status quo. Confidence is a problem, intimidation to death, and having no choice but to die or be killed are the general implications of this picture. In the 11th, 12th, and 13th visuals, a medium shooting scale was preferred to strengthen the viewer's effect. In the middle shot, the above-knee part of the actor's body was framed and aimed to bring the audience closer to the event. Medium shots, which mostly have an important place in themed films, emphasize the relationship between the inner world and the outer world of the person (Bazin, 2011, p. 50). The primary purpose of showing the upper part of the chest area in the middle shot is to reflect the players' mood. This shooting scale tries to give context information by showing the player's state.

Below are images about removing the shapes drawn on the tough dalgona candy in the umbrella game without breaking in a specific time, the joy of achieving this, and the representation of the happiness given by the motivation to succeed.

**Image 14**



**Image 15**



**Image 16**



To get rid of the intolerable situation, people must participate in a life-or-death game by putting their lives on the line. Desperation leaves people not to participate in the games but in a situation that will cost them their lives. The “licking” scene in the umbrella play represents the way the actors can get rid of their previous lives and open the door to a more inhumane life is represented by the “licking” scene in the umbrella play. The metaphor of “licking” shockingly implies that people are forced to compromise their dignity, honor, and dignity to stay in the system. The “licking” scene represents how to hold on, rise, progress, and survive in the system; being cute to the sovereign will is represented by the “licking” scene. The joy of being able to hold on to life after the actor's “licking” metaphor is represented in Visuals 15 and 16.

**Table 5.** Analysis of Indicators

Images	Sign	Signifier	Signified
Image 14	dalgona candy	Life's challenges, career path full of obstacles	Survival and survival require wisdom and strategy.
Image 15	act of licking	Life is like chewing an iron chickpea.	The bread in the lion's mouth is an established system that undermines the human being's dignity, honor, and dignity.
Image 16	pleasure of success	the hope of escaping despair	Being willing to do anything to get up from the ground represents the first thing the poor eat: personality and dignity.
Shooting scale	Images 14, 15, and 16, Over Shoulder Shot	Only face	Facial expressions and emotions.

The painting shows the audience that survival depends on wisdom and strategy, not just brute force. In this order, the bread is in the lion's mouth, and it is challenging for a man to live a life of dignity. To survive and lead his life in dignity, man has to face many risks and dangers. The price of being poor and deprived is wasting honor and dignity.

When we look at the shooting scales, it is seen that the shoulder shooting scale (Over Shoulder Shot) is preferred in images 14, 15, and 16. In this way, the audience was asked to be involved in the process and to feel deeply what was going on in the real world, thanks to the fictional world. In the shooting of the person or object, it was desired that the audience grasp the event from the director's eyes.

In the images below, the man who had to cross a glass bridge, the tug-of-war represents that success depends not on brute strength but on tactical strategy and a functional mind; the weak or strong enemy should not be underestimated. The representations of the power of the woman's anger are seen.

**Image 17**



**Image 18**



**Image 19**



The bridge is made of glass, representing that a thread ties ordinary human lives. The fact that the glass master is led by malicious people who think they are smart does not represent that they want him to go to the other side and save himself but that if someone is going to die, they want him to be someone else. In this powerful message in the series, the mind that knows strategy is represented using someone else as a "mine donkey" in risky business. The mine-ass tactic is a manipulation tactic that is frequently used in political communication. In the series, the fact that survival depends on defeating opponents is represented in visual 16. Another point implied in this scene is that even a game based on brute force, such as tug-of-war, is not just brute force but has some tactics and

strategies. In Visual 17, it is strikingly represented that the enemy is never underestimated, especially those whose paths are made of glass are always more careful.

**Table 6.** Analysis of Indicators

Images	Sign	Signifier	Signified
Image 17	glass bridge	The struggle for survival, preparation for the way of death	Tied to life by a thread, worthless bodies of those without status, cheap lives, and useful ones.
Image 18	Tug of war	Brute force and tactics	The defeat of brute force by tactics and strategy.
Image 19	man and woman	woman hugging her enemy	The woman's anger and vengeance, the enemy, are never taken lightly.
Shooting scale	17, image, medium shot,	Most of the body	Public relationship
	Image 18 long shot	Decor and people	Space, public distance, social context
	Image 19 close-shot	only face.	Facial expressions and emotions

In Table 6, desperate people tied by a thread of life to the audience, who have no status, and who have turned their worthless bodies into someone else's play are represented. It is the souls of these helpless people that they put out for someone else to lead a slightly more enjoyable life and even have fun. This table also represents the defeat of brute force to tactics and strategy. The woman's anger and the desire for revenge drag the man to death, reflecting that the enemy should never be taken lightly.

The medium shot scale was preferred when looking at the shooting scales to see the personal relationships and the players' situation a little closer in visual 17. This shot is intended to show how dramatic the results of ignorant courage will be. Figure 18 represents what kind of difficulties people must overcome in the real world to survive. In addition, close-up shots were preferred at 19 to show that it is more dangerous to make enemies at difficult times.

In the images below, people with no future (mother and son) looking at an empty table with empty eyes are seen on one side, while on the other hand, horny people who see people as objects and live in pomp are represented.

**Image 20**



**Image 21**



**Image 22**



One of the themes in the series is that the history of humanity is a history of class struggle, and social classes are based on socio-economic inequalities. This is a world of inequalities where, on the one hand, there are people who put their bodies on the line to survive; on the other hand, there are speculators who make big money in seconds with various speculative methods. In such a system, it is not difficult to leave people poor and make their bodies suitable for all kinds of operations,

even turning them into a game tool. The social status of people with inferior socio-economic status and the entertainment of people with high incomes are represented in different ways in the images above. For the state of helplessness to be exploited and used for its benefit, it is necessary to substitute poverty, leaving people intentionally poor.

**Table 7.** Analysis of Indicators

Images	Sign	Signifier	Signified
Image 20	man and his mother	Desperate people stared blankly at the empty table.	Desperate eyes, poor people who cannot hold on, people with no future.
Image 21	female body	Power over the female body	The exploitation of the female body, its transformation into an object of consumption, and its commodification
Image 22	They are a luxurious and horny minority.	Moral bankruptcy.	Consumption frenzy, hedonic lifestyles, controlling the glands.
Shooting scale	Images 20, 21, and 22 are long shots	Decor and people context	Space, public distance, social context.

The situation reflected in Table 7, the hopeless eyes, the tragic situation experienced by the poor people who cannot hold on to life, and the unfortunate majority who have no future are tried to be felt by the language of the cinema. On the one hand, the transformation of the female body into an object of consumption and its commodification; on the other hand, the whole context of a raging minority living in a consumption frenzy has been shown with remote shooting to create a consciousness in the audience.

In Gorse 20, 21, and 22, distance shooting was preferred and aimed to show all sides of the shooting area. The aim is for the audience to comprehend the different lifestyles in all their dimensions and create consciousness. It is desired that the place, people, and objects in the scene are presented to the audience from a distant perspective and that the audience can see the context and the whole event together. Since it is desired that the audience be affected by the magnitude and tragic situation of the event, the long shot scale was preferred. Thus, it was desired to create awareness in the audience about how social relations are built on reality.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Film productions' messages are transmitted through symbolic, semiotic, linguistic, and visual messages. When visuals are evaluated in terms of connotation, the myth that neoliberal fiction only serves the interests of a minimal group is encountered. Findings from the study show that Social Darwinist assumptions support the social and economic inequality created by the neoliberal order. In the series, the weak, who form the basis of society, are represented by negative metaphors such as greed, cruelty, and brutality. This situation is represented by visual codes that justify Hobbes' motto, "Homo hominy lupus-man is man's wolf." As the games of the TV series called *Squid Game*

are played, visuals that justify the evolution theory's assumption that "weak creatures that have difficulty adapting to the environment are replaced by those who can better adapt to the conditions" are frequently encountered. In the TV series *Squid Game*, the director creates a deeper dystopia to criticize neoliberal dystopia.

Analysis findings show that the series has two main contents: recruitment and elimination. One is being shot with a gun, and the other falls from a height. While the director uses the former as a metaphor for being fired from the workplace and excluded from the system, the act of relegation indicates a relegation from the upper level to the lower level (dismissal) in the organizational hierarchy. This shows that winning and losing do not depend on abilities but on the will of the dominant people. Research findings show that the strong exploit the bodies and hopes of the weak, sometimes with brute force or more sophisticated methods. The exploitation of the weak by the strong continues in one way or another in all times and societies. This situation finds its true meaning in the phrase "I make money by lending" by Oh II Nam, the number one player.

The findings show that *Social Darwinism* provides a suitable theoretical background for the series analysis. The connotation tried in the series shows that the laws of Evolution operating in the natural world continue in the form of *Social Darwinism* in the social world. As Fukuyama says, the ongoing conflict in the natural and social world does not indicate the end of history but that history continues to flow forward. One of the main themes in the series is that the facts about income inequality are not challenging to find in the real world. According to the 2020 report of Transparency International, the wealth of the wealthiest 1% of the world is more than twice the total wealth of 6.9 billion people, and the wealth of the richest 2153 people is more than the total wealth of 4.6 billion people. The total wealth of the 22 wealthiest men globally is more than that of all women in the African continent (seffalik.org). According to the World Inequality Database, the wealthiest 1% of *South Korea's* population owns about 25% of the country's wealth. *South Korea* ranks first in the world regarding income inequality (borgenproject.org).

In the *Squid Game* series, technical and cultural codes such as shooting scales, camera movements, camera angles, light, and visual effects have provided connotation and created a perception of reality. The reality in this perception of reality is presented operationally with the pre-production, production, and post-production phases. The signs are positioned as the twin of the real, and the referents are kept alive through the signs. This technique aims to reach a hyper-reality since another reality has replaced reality.

As a result, *Squid Game* can be considered a work that allows the reflection on many concepts. While watching such productions is entertaining, it is vital to make an artistic touch on the deep wounds in society. In this research, it was impossible to reflect on the dialogues, striking expressions, visuals, and metaphors used in the series. To better understand the research problem, it would be helpful to explain the subject of inequality with class conflict theories and evolutionary conflict theory. This study can be expected to guide future studies. In addition, it can be argued that the research will contribute to forming new literature in this direction.

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