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**Conveying social drama through violence, or violence – through social drama:
Squid Game series analysis**

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The sudden outburst of Squid Game popularity in 2021, became an example of instant acceptance of one title by almost everyone. After its release on 17th of September 2021 on Netflix platform, Season 1 got 111 million viewers, according to the platform's metrics, overtaking the leading position from such western shows as Bridgerton: Season 1 with its 82 million views or, an example closer to its genres – Stranger Things: Season 3 with 67 million views [6]. Released in 2024, second Season continued to hold the leading positions on Netflix charts and became third most popular non-English show with 26.3 million views gained within one week. By this time, Squid Game Season 2 turned into most popular Netflix streamed sequel so far [5]. The series gained its fame due to creative approach in showing violence and combining it with strong social commentary on some of the most relevant issues of modern times.

The plot of the series circles around such social issues as: social inequality, debt, loss of moral compass and desperation – problems familiar to the majority of people around the world. The approach taken by the creator of the show Hwang Dong-hyuk, resonates with basic sense of human compassion. Moreover, this relevance additionally corresponds with religious ideology. In South Korea, Christianity is the dominating religion, after starting its spread in VIII-IX century and making around 30% of whole population Christian, according to 2019 statistic [2]. The vast majority of people living in Europe and South and North America belong to the same faith, which makes the show's appeal more comprehensible and touching. Victory in the games equals salvation, failure – descend to purgatory. No one can affect participant's decisions, leading them to either “hell” or “heaven”, which leaves the outcome purely on the human's freedom of choice and their readiness to give up goodness in them. The main character of the show, Seong Gi-hun, stands out among other participants by conveying by his own example an important message – it is possible to survive hell and remain a human being. This idea brings the whole Season 1 to a an empowering conclusion that gives hope to those who found themselves victims to social injustices and ever experienced moral struggle.

Another mean through which the Squid Game manages to convey social drama - is by demonstrating social inequality, which resonates with recent historical events. In the interview to AFP director Hwang Dong-hyuk, mentioned that the production of Season 2 had been inspired by workers strike in 2009 on Ssangyong Motors [4]. One of the concepts in the show stems from the idea of wealth and sense of security being ephemeral. This directly corresponds with the outcome of an instant mass layoff of workers of Ssangyong Motors that led to violence with deadly outcome on the side of workers. By bringing such parallels in the series, Squid Game raises direct attention to an issue of extreme wealth and poverty and rising numbers of unemployed continuously growing from 2009 up to this day.

To Western audience, Squid Game's brutal trials correspond with the events of 24 of October 1929 and the Wall Street crash that led to mass chaos in USA and beginning of Great Depression in Europe. For Americans, who managed to increase real GDP from 1920's \$688 billion to \$ 977

billion in 1929, and the average income by \$1,500 [3] the sudden crash of market meant instant descend into poverty so well portrayed in the series.

Europe suffered from the Great Depression no less than America. The sudden decline in industrial stock prices in Germany was 64%, 60% in France and 48% in Great Britain. Mass bankruptcy and unemployment that followed it led to the increase of crime, dehumanization of society, an increase in mortality and rising of radical movements such as National Socialist German Workers' Party in 1933[1]. Squid Game creates conditions similar to the ones during the Great Depression for its players, and serves as a reminder for modern society of the dangers of excessive wealth and struggle of the survivors.

However as "The Guardian" mentioned in their article, in comparison to Season 1, Season 2 changed its focus from portraying social drama through shocking games, to pursuing revenge by one character on another [7]. The show gained much more of an action content with victims appearing outside the games, rather than using violence in the contests which emphasizes the existence of these problems in reality, outside the games.

Considering all the facts mentioned above and discovered by means of comparison and data analysis, it could be argued, that the current course of Squid Game development, has been shifting from its original representation of social drama, to a more general series, filled with movie tropes. Season 1 brought a strong statement on human resilience and undying desire for justice. Season 2, on the other hand, shifted the focus from seeking justice to looking for revenge. Therefore, after combining the results of the analysis, the interdependency, as well as progression of violent content and social message in the series can be clearly observed, thus allowing future analysis of Squid Game development.

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