



## **Prototypes of Teenagers and Construction of Identity in Adolescents through Film: A Study of *Tahidi High* – A Kenyan Television Drama**

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### **Abstract**

Identity is the recognition of one's potential and qualities as an individual, especially in relation to social context. Identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning, identities are quite complex. Film being a crucial mode for edutainment is an apt avenue for gaining knowledge on a people's sense of identity. *Tahidi High* is a Kenyan TV drama whose main focus is the teenage high-schooler. In enunciating the dramas of teenagers, the TV drama inexorably exemplifies the adolescents' struggles to apprehend themselves and their surroundings. Veritably, the drama suggests that we might think of teenage identities as framed by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative; the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture. Subsequently, this paper examines the portrayal of the teenage student characters in *Tahidi High* with a view to look at how the socio-emotional stage of teenage – identity crisis - and milieu has contributed to the representation of the teenagers and hanker to understand themselves and environment. Basing upon the theoretical perspectives of psychologist Erik Erikson, this paper examines the dilemmas of the student teenagers. The quest for affiliation, the fear of alienation, responsibility and role taking, naïve idealism and role modelling are some of the issues attendant to teenage identity crisis that have been discussed.

## Introduction

Erikson (1970) defines identity as a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, juxtaposed with the sameness and continuity of some shared world image. In other words therefore, one's identity is that person's conscious or unconscious being, put alongside the way the society is structured. The inference here is that society has a bearing on the identity of its individuals.

Erikson (1970) further defines 'Identity Crisis' as a period of time when an individual carries out intensive analysis one's person and explores the various ways of looking at oneself. Because Erikson believed that personality develops in stages, he outlined the different stages of psychosocial development through which a person's identity systematically changes and becomes shaped. Of all the stages, Erikson contends that the teenage years mark the time when the identity crisis intensifies and emerges more clearly. At this time, teenagers are caught in between feelings of identity and role confusion. In discussing the identity crises in the student characters, Erikson's stages of psychosocial development have been called upon to make informed arguments and conclusions.

Erikson's ideas are further advanced by Marcia, J. (1966, 1976, and 1980). The latter comes up with four different identity statuses namely: identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure and identity diffusion. Identity achievement is a status at which one commits to a specific identity after a period of exploration and experimentation of various identities. This case is evident in Tahidi High. Human beings experience a status of moratorium, when they are actively involved in exploring divergent identities. By virtue of the age bracket of the student characters in Tahidi High, (13-18), this state of identity search becomes an important part of the object in this chapter.

However, some individuals (few in this case) have the benefit of making a commitment to one given identity without attempting exploration. Such people are said to be in the status of identity foreclosure. The fourth and last status, identity diffusion, refers to the rare case in which neither exploration of various identities is made, nor a commitment to any achieved.

The characteristics of Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development are crucial in helping one understand the student characters insofar as identity is concerned. The stage in Erikson's terms is referred to as *Fidelity: Identity vs. Role Confusion*. It covers the teenage bracket of between thirteen and nineteen years. The student characters in the Television Drama fall within this age bracket. It is this stage that represents the transition from childhood to adulthood and with it, come the most intense crises in the life of a human being yet. The reason given by Erikson leads to the understanding that at this time, teenagers experience radical changes including body changes that come with puberty and a more developed mind to analyze the intentions of the self and the intentions of others.

During these years, the individual becomes concerned with their appearance before others, explores various career and occupational choices, and desires affiliation with other people or groups. Generally, the teenager during these years asks questions about who they really are. According to Erikson, most teenagers finally end up achieving a realization of who they are and eventually knowing and even determining the direction of their lives.

This paper, analyzes the lead student characters going by the paradigm set above.

## Career Choices: The Conflict between Desire and Parental Expectations

One of the hallmarks of the *Fidelity: Identity vs. Role Confusion* stage in the development of use the word human beings is the identification, by an individual, of the roles they would like to play in the adult world. This identification of prospective adult roles is characterized by making career choices and becoming committed to them, and/or experiencing role confusion (uncertainty about which role to play when adulthood sets in).

During these years, as evident in Tahidi High, parents would mostly want to have influence on what their children should be in future. Sometimes these parental expectations concerning the direction of their children's lives are too strong that children eventually surrender to them. This is followed either by the children's identity achievement (resolving their crisis and beginning of commitment to one career choice) or passive acceptance of the parental model of role identification.

The case of Banjo, a form two boy in Tahidi High School, best illustrates this. For some reasons, one of them being that Banjo would like to make advances to Shish, a form three student, she can be his girlfriend; he decides to join the school tennis team. Soon after, the tennis coach, Teacher Okello realizes that Banjo is truly talented and could shape his future through playing tennis. Later on, Banjo's mother gets to know that he has started playing tennis instead of concentrating fully on his studies. His mother goes to school to settle the matter, with her mind already made up that Banjo must stop playing tennis and give an undivided concentration to his studies.

Going by the ideas advanced by Erikson, in the absence of parental influence and interference, in which case the teenager will get enough time and space to experiment, it is given that they most certainly will eventually emerge from this crisis with a firmer sense of identity and emotional awareness. Banjo's mother denies him this space and time. Despite Okello's counsel that tennis is important to Banjo, and that it can in fact give him a career, Banjo's mother insists that her son's career lies in academics. Before walking away in a sore mood, she declares with a sobering note of finality:

His father and I have decided that he has to stop participating in tennis and concentrate on his studies. Banjo's career will be determined by his passing in exams and then we will take him to a university abroad. And that is final!

It is at this point that the paradox of the belief that students make career choices should dawn upon the audience: some of the career choices that students make in school are in actual sense an extension of the parental domineering attitude which begins way back at home. This attitude eventually forces children to fit into the strait jacket patterns that their parents dictate. The eventual consequence is; the students end up adopting identities that their parents approve of, and not their own.

The appropriately paradoxical impact of this overbearing parental attitude is soon realized when Mule steps up to take the place left by Banjo and ends up winning a scholarship abroad. The Television Drama presents this irony of expectations to enable the audience see that parents will not necessarily lead their children to a desirably successful future just because they insist on making career choices for them.

It is Mule who through tennis, a game Banjo is withdrawn from by his mother, is able to secure a scholarship. He goes on to study in the same place where Banjo's parents had wanted to take him after completion of studies, and passing of his examinations. At the announcement of Mule's success, Banjo looks on clearly disappointed. He must rue the missed opportunity as Mule celebrates after winning the scholarship for playing a game that Banjo's mother had determinedly forced him out of.

### **“To be with or not to be *with*?”: Quest for Affiliation and Belonging**

The search for affiliation, which boldly emerges out of Tahidi High, is one of the ways in which the teenagers' quest for identity is expressed. All the lead student characters in the Television drama desire to have an attachment to either one other student (sometimes more than one student) or other people outside of the teenage bracket. The first kind of these relationships that stands out is the relationship between students of the opposite sex. Looking at this, it becomes clear that the teenagers are living during a stage that corresponds with one of the salient characteristics of their teenage identity crisis: search for Sexual Identity.

Once this attachment is established, or seems to have been, we see those involved going to great lengths to protect the resultant identification. It is because of this reason that the territorialism earlier mentioned manifests itself. From the scene at the basketball court, Jean-Joyce complains that lately Frankie has been acting as if every boy in school belongs to her. From this statement, the understanding is that Jean-Joyce believes Frankie may take away Ray from her.

To Jean-Joyce, Ray is her boyfriend and thus part of her territory, which she feels entitled to protect. This state of affairs is true about her just as it is about other girls and boys that have friends of the opposite sex. To prove her possession, she spends most of the time tagging Ray's shirt around. Of course this is aimed at making the rest of the girls aware that she is the owner of the 'territory'. That territory is in this case Ray's person.

Sometimes the search for what can be called opposite-sex affiliation is met by hostility from the target individual. Banjo, obviously desirous of fitting in the category of the famed boys who have girlfriends in the school, approaches Shish. The latter, more than clearly, tells him off that she is not his type. Not willing to give up just as yet, Banjo exhibits a certain tenacity of purpose to an extent of appearing desperate. Paired with Banjo's failure to fit in Shish's company is the latter's objective to identify with those she considers to be of her type.

At this point in time, it is realized that Banjo's objective of joining the school's tennis team – albeit in part – is to get a chance to be close enough to Shish who is also a member of the team. Teacher Okello, the tennis coach realizes this and at one time asks Banjo. Although Banjo does not readily admit it, all indications point to the fact that he suffers from a certain obsession regarding Shish. Having realized this, Okello counsels Banjo after tactfully asking his opinion on who is the better player between Stella, another female player, and Shish:

- Okello:        Between Shish and Stella, who is better?  
 Banjo:         I think Shish  
 Okello:        Why?  
 Banjo:         She is strong ... yeah, she is strong.  
 Okello:        And she has long legs? Let me give you some advice,

stick to what you know. This girl, she has become an addiction to you. Very dangerous, I tell you my friend. Stick to tennis. It will take you somewhere.

The vague manner in which Banjo describes Shish above can point to his obsession he has with the girl

These opposite-sex-affiliations are not permanent. As it is shown in Tahidi High, they are short-lived and tempered with jealousy and shows of pride (pride especially depending on who in the association perceives they hold the higher stakes). Loyalties change almost unpredictably. On the day of the school's opening day, and two days after the students' drunken party, Ray complains to Jean-Joyce saying the latter has not been giving him the deserved attention as her boyfriend:

Ray: Jean-Joyce, why did you have to do that to me at the gate? Snobbing like that in front of other guys?

Jean: What? Listen, if you have your *domes* (personal problems), please don't involve me.

Ray: Jean-Joyce, me I have been thinking, our relationship is hitting the rocks.

Jean: So you are noticing? Huh! (to Mule) hey, is that Mule? You have such a sexy body.

Ray: You see? We are busy talking about .... You are busy looking at another jamaa.

Jean: Oh! Like I am not supposed to do what you do? Remember over the holidays you were busy *katiyaring* Shish. Mule .....

The urge to even the score being high as it so often is amongst teenagers – and indeed as it usually is even among other age groups, partners in these relationships will tend towards the idea of revenging against the perceived or real misdeeds of their counterparts in the relationship. From the above altercation, Jean-Joyce wants to make Ray aware that her behavior is a result of his conduct. She in fact wants him to become jealous. Apparently, Jean-Joyce appears to understand the concept of negative psychology and seems intent on making Ray feel guilty so that he can become even more committed to her.

Immediately after the above exchange, Jean-Joyce walks away, leaving Ray standing alone, and in practiced wiles, drifts towards Mule to go and talk to him. Though it may seem a move meant to evoke jealousy in Ray, Jean-Joyce slowly begins drifting away from Ray, towards Mule. At this point it should be understood that Mule has no designs to get into a relationship with her. This is the nature of the temporary teenage flirtation as evidenced in Tahidi High; jealousy, quest for revenge and feelings of self-importance. These are elements that illustrate utter disregard for what the opposite party in the relationship may feel. Jean-Joyce's seeming intent to replace Ray with Mule, which is in actual understanding a design to make Ray more loyal, inspires a conflict between the two boys.

Ray: Mule, stay away from Jean-Joyce.

Mule: Ray mzeiya, sikiza. Mimi sijisikiinahuyo dame. Weweunajisikiana dame nahatayeyehakutaki. (*Man, Ray, listen to me; I have no interest in*

*Jean-Joyce. You want that girl but she is not interested in you) In fact you will be doing me a favour by getting her off my back.*

The above case sets forth the audience towards the understanding of the fact that rejection, which is more often encountered by boys, is not only directed towards them. The teenage female characters too have their share of frustrations as they struggle to fit within the dictates of the Tahidi High School mould by zealously seeking boy-friends.

Though by episodes far between, it is shown that every time a new boy arrives at the school, scrambles emerge amongst the girls with most of them aiming at being the first to secure a relationship with the new boy in school. This happens with both Mule and OJ. When Mule arrives at the school, Frankie and Mary get bid to win him over. For Mule's case, it has more to do with his appearance to them as mysterious because of his bias towards Sheng, than with anything else. Mule somehow fascinates the girls. Seemingly, it would appear prestigious to girls in high-cost secondary schools in Kenya to have a boyfriend who speaks sheng', comes from the ghetto but is bright and has a certain assertive aspect.

Jean-Joyce and Mary are some of the girls whose advances Mule rejects. From a slightly different perspective, such boys should really be mysterious and attractive to girls who perceive themselves as high-class, arguably because of their status consciousness. As a consequence of the wealth of their parents, Jean-Joyce and Mary might naturally be expected to show flashes of pride and indicate feelings of apartness. We can argue that the girls want to 'love' such boys for the reason that, to them, such boys represent an extraordinary kind of poor boys who can pass examinations and match the ambitions of the perceived high-class individuals.

### **Feeling of Otherness vis-à-vis the Fear of Alienation**

In retrospect, the adult characters who react on the elopement of Ray and Jean-Joyce do not seem to realize that there is a shared loyalty among the students in their engagements with each other. To them, this loyalty to each other is what creates the sense of sameness among them. Morality ceases to be considerations in such cases.

This sense of sameness is evident when both Frankie and Shish sympathize with Jean-Joyce on learning that she is a single-parent child, her mother having left her father when she was still an infant. They identify with Jean-Joyce as being one of their kind, despite the bitter rivalry and a significant measure of hatred that exists between her and them. Amongst teenagers, in the face of the realization of a problem that is specific to teenagers, even some rivalries pale into insignificance. Following her seeming elopement with Ray, Jean-Joyce is suspended and taken to rehabilitation by her father. For the first time, Shish and Frankie wish her well in her absence and hope that the counselling she is undergoing will lessen her burden after being depressed by her father's rejection of the relationship with Ray.

A postulation explaining Mule's fear of being alienated from the group of fellow students, which is inevitable when reveals Jean-Joyce's hideout, can be found in the experience of other characters. Some of the students in Tahidi High have tasted of the effects of alienation and none of them would like to be a victim again. A case in point is Kirio. His conduct in school is at some point linked to the discrimination he faces at home. A peer counselling session with Frankie reveals that Kirio's molestation of other students is a form of release. He has been a victim of paternal aliena-

tion. This reality comes out of his revelation of the way his step father treats him. He complains of physical beating from the stepfather who does not treat his own biological children in the same manner.

Another character who once experiences the unfavourable feeling of being out of place is Habakkuk. He dreads the possibility that he is not fitting in fully with the other boys in his school generally, and his class particularly. This fear, not just in Habakkuk, but in other teenagers of his age as well, oftentimes leads to delinquency. Habakkuk steals a Disc Man (a handheld digital music player) so that he also can own one like most boys in his class. He is especially under pressure because his father is also the Deputy Principal of the school and is more economically endowed than the parents of most boys who have most things that Habakkuk lacks.

I asked you to buy me a disc man and you refused. Whenever I ask anything from you, you say it is useless. All my friends have disc mans except me; they have good mobile phones except me. Their parents give them good pocket money and you don't give me anything. Yet we are richer than them. I even can't go out with my friends because I don't have 50 Cent and G-Unit clothes like them. I look like a *chokoraa* in front of them.

Then this being the case, that theft is a way of calling upon the attention of his father to provide him with what his heart desires. When confronted by his father who unfortunately prefers a hard-line stance to an understanding one, he speaks out his mind in the above words.

### **The 'Absence' of Home**

Most times, the desire to feel wanted makes some teenagers go beyond the limits of the audience's expectations. In the adventurous world of the teenagers, the talk of the impossible therefore becomes a matter that should be treated with caution. Teenagers, apparently, can do just about anything in their craving to belong with the opposite sex. This craving is motivated by a lack of belonging at home. This case is exemplified when, after taking advantage of a school camping trip to sneak, Ray goes into hiding with Jean-Joyce with the help of Kirio.

Enabled by the vast economic capabilities their parents' money can provide, the trio rent a high-cost house in which Ray and Jean-Joyce live with indications typical of people who are practically married. Upon being found, Jean-Joyce's outburst to her father demonstrates the lengths to which school going teenagers are ready to go if only to protect their relationships with those of the opposite sex.

Daddy, stop interfering with my life. I love Ray. Please Dr. Mutiso, tell my dad to stop interfering with my life, or else I am gonna kill myself.

In her peculiar case, it is the lack of parental attention at home that pushes her to these lengths in order to belong. Jean-Joyce would also like to enjoy the warmth of companionship that comes from associating with family, especially parents, just like any other teenager would. Unfortunately for her, she has only her father, perennially busy in business, as her parent. As earlier observed, the teenage years are character-

ized by such crisis and confusion as must require them to belong with others to get warmth and, more importantly, direction.

Unfortunately for her, she is torn between identifying with the ordained order of being obedient in school, and embarking on her quest to belong with others. In an attempt to resolve her dilemma, which is in other words an effort to resolve her identity crisis, she is not afraid to break a few regulations both at school and at home. That is why she has no qualms about escaping to a hideout with Ray. She describes him as the only human being who really loves her and cares for her feelings. It might even appear that Jean-Joyce finds the father-figure that she lacks at home in Ray.

Jean-Joyce's father seems to think that the comfort which money is thought to afford is enough to fulfil the emotional needs of her daughter and therefore provides nothing else to ensure her all-rounded development. Jean-Joyce enjoys comforts such as being taken to an expensive salon, given pizza from home for lunch at school, and being driven to school. But there is every indication that she lacks attention from her father who, worse, is a single parent. In one case, she complains to her father when he says he is so busy to drive her to a party: However unimportant her demand, her complain: "people don't even know who my father is; they think my father is the driver!" should reveal a deep-seated emotional lack. Later on, the above complain appears a harbinger for worse to be shown.

Moments after Jean-Joyce and Ray have been dug out from their hideout in a rich neighbourhood, a conversation between her father, Andrew, and Teacher Hamida reveals the motivations behind the girl's escapades. From it, it happens that Jean-Joyce's father has obviously misunderstood the role of a responsible parent:

**Andrew:** I give her everything she wants. I buy her the best gifts. I am even planning to take her on a trip to Paris.

**Hamida:** It is true you do that. But have you ever wondered what else you haven't given her?

**Andrew:** What?

**Hamida:** Time! Your daughter is calling out: "Hey daddy I am here!"

**Andrew:** I don't have a lot of time. I am a very busy man.

From this conversation, we can establish that Jean-Joyce is just one of those unfortunate children whose parents never get to admit the fact that failure by their children to adjust to required social order and demands, stems from their (parents's) own failings. One of these failings is not finding time for their children.

### **Trickster Figure Boys: The Bad Boy Syndrome**

The arrival of OJ at Tahidi High School and his subsequent relationships with the girl students provides another dimension to the nature of relationships between boys and girls in the school. These relationships are representative of the kind of relationships that one would find anywhere else in Kenya among teenagers of the same age. The one relationship that is clearly realised upon his entry into the school is between him and Tanya.

A fundamental issue arises from the interaction between these two characters: the attraction of girls to the image of the "bad boy". Girls in Tahidi High School are seen to desire the wayward boys more than to the forthright ones. Another character who becomes a victim of OJ's "bad boy" conduct is Vero. While talking to Maryanne,



she wonders why she is attracted to OJ in spite of having seen how dishonest the latter is. Maryanne offers insight into this matter:

- Vero:** Why can't he be a gentleman like Andy? Why doesn't he change?  
**Maryanne:** If he did that, he would lose your attraction to him. My dear girl, the 'bad boy' in him is playing havoc in you. You just have to accept that.

Further to that, the seeming abandoning of the chase of a girl by a boy is seen to work in the reverse, making the girl to desire the boy even more.

OJ becomes famous for double-dealing and dumping girlfriends once they fall into his trap. In fact at one point he accepts to *use* Vero to assist Freddie win the supremacy battle between him and Andy. He has absolutely nothing to gain from it and does it also for the fun of it. Freddie says that Andy does not deserve a girlfriend like Vero and urges OJ to bid for her and spoil it for Andy. At first, OJ is opposed to the idea but changes his mind when Freddie reveals to him the adventure in the prospect of dumping her shortly after winning her over from Andy. In effect, the audience therefore sees the manner in which girls may be used by boys who claim to be their boyfriends. This often happens in the process of boys settling supremacy scores amongst themselves.

- Freddie:** OJ, that loser does not deserve a chick like that.  
 Wewehumuonagi vile yeyehukaadwanzi? (*Don't you ever see how he looks like an idiot?*)  
**OJ:** Unasuggestni do? (*What do you suggest I do?*)  
**Freddie:** Mwahi! (*Go for her!*) And I will help you.  
**OJ:** But I am not interested in her.  
**Freddie:** It does not matter. Just play her for some while halafuumdump. The important thing is to get her from Andy.  
**OJ:** (Musing): Yenyewe. I think that will be fun.  
 Nimuhunthalafukakiiva, nikasaare cold-blood.  
**Freddie:** That's my guy. That loser needs to betaught a lesson or two.  
**OJ:** Tuna need strategy.  
**Freddie:** Drawing board.

Those boys like OJ, who are strategic enough to realise the influence of the principle of reverse psychology, take advantage of the situation and put on more of an enhanced identity of a "bad boy". It even appears that some boys become "bad boys" deliberately with the intention of attracting a category of girls who readily gets attracted to boys who advertently paint themselves as villains. True to the above reality, Vero submits to the advances by OJ and as Becky explains. It is actualised that part of the reason why she accepts OJ is his not-so-straight character.

- Tanya:** I don't think so. That chick looks too level-headed. And who doesn't know OJ is a player?  
**Becky:** Don't you know that the bad boys always get the good chicks?

The bad boys are considered both heroes among fellow boys, and an attraction

to the girls. While a girl may feel embarrassed when revelations of intimate involvement come up, the boy, on the contrary, gets cheered by fellow boys who view him as one who has made a breakthrough. Surprisingly, even the girls more and more begin to view the errant boy as an enticing target in their relationship escapades. On the afternoon when OJ and Stella are caught kissing in one of the classrooms, OJ ends up triumphantly when the incident is revealed to other students by Teacher Ngatia.

Perhaps Ngatia would have earlier imagined that both OJ and Stella would receive their fair share of humiliation and embarrassment. It is only Stella who loses in the affair as OJ receives the “more fire” cheers of encouragement from fellow boys. Even those boys who would not do what OJ does, maybe more out of fear than out of being commanding of morality, identify with him. Psychologically, they get satisfaction because OJ is some kind of a trickster, who on their behalf accomplishes something they would have loved to do yet they cannot do it either because they are afraid, or because their personality does not give the resources to accomplish what they view as a remarkable achievement.

### **Identification with the Order of Society**

Some affiliations are however pragmatic and are formed not out of the desire to be part of a group or be with one another, but purely for reasons of convenience. Once the aims of the affiliation become fulfilled, the alliance ceases to exist. This can be said of the sort of political alliance between Charlie and Sonny, both of whom vie to become head boy and head girl respectively. This is an alliance formed because of political reasons and is in every way similar to alliances formed in the adult political world.

Mark and Shish enter into such other alliance. It is symptomatic of political alliances. Even among teenagers, as it is among adults, alliances of this kind are based upon practical reasons rather than moral considerations. This should serve as one of the pointers to the proposition that teenage years are a mere prelude to the adult years and therefore teenage behaviour is not far from the conduct of adults, mostly here, in relation to politics. Even at their age, these students have accepted the order of things in society and have taken their side by identifying with it.

The alliance between Mark and Shish, both of whom aspire to become student leaders, reveals the level to which expediency can take teenagers, and in a sense show how good children are at picking lessons from adults around them. Mark, though still a student, appears to have fully mastered the crafty art that politics has become in contemporary Kenya. As he speaks, the audience gets it that even school children know only too well that it is this craftiness that separates the wannabes in politics and the never-wannabes. Apart from it being identification with each other because of a shared aim, there is an extended identification with certain political ideas and practices. That such ideas and practices may be immoral is not the matter; what matters is the aim; which justifies the means.

To win the bid, Mark and Shish must sit down and draft a strategy to take them through. Some of the suggestions that Shish makes are indeed naïve but they suffice to illustrate the students' identification with, and indeed adoption of, what goes on behind the scenes in most political power struggles. Shish gives various suggestions, ranging from bribing students and kidnapping their opponents (however impractical this is), to producing fake ballot papers and throwing Sonny's desk in the swimming pool to make her abandon the bid to become head girl. Mark recommends

the last option with a statement to back the idea:

The idea of throwing her desk into the pool, is great! You know girl, you watch too many movies....That is how MPs get back to parliament. Use violence and dirty tricks and then cover all the tracks. We might as well follow their example; play politics. You know politics is dirty... and tough.

The clenching of fists and the determined look on his face that accompanies these words signifies just what a tough decision it is they are making by doing the wrong which they must do to win the election. Even though the two realize that what they are plotting to do is illegitimate, they also understand that it is one of the most realistic means of accomplishing their desired intents. Besides being a sign of the students' identification with the filthy, yet the practical, the statements of intentions by Shish and Mark are also the Television Drama's veiled jab at the political class. In her typically sarcastic though light fashion, Shish says:

First, we throw her desk into the swimming pool. And then, we will smile at the people. And they won't even have a clue we did it!

The Kenyan teenager's knowledge of the propaganda machinery that underlies political contests is also elevated. Shish orchestrates a smear campaign to discredit other contestants and hold them to relief as immoral, hence unfit to be student leaders. She is actually the author and distributor of a letter and leaflets alleging that Sonny and Charlie are sleeping together.

We know that you two are sleeping together. That is why you are campaigning together to be head boy and head girl.

She wants the student community to believe that the alliance between Charlie and Sonny is not just one to help them meet their leadership ambitions, but that it stems from a more horrid sexual association. It takes Charlie's keen mind to notice that Shish is playing propaganda to scuttle their ambitions to become head boy and head girl. This is realization he makes clear to Sonny when she is just about to quit the contest.

Although the Television Drama does not directly and intrusively castigate such unscrupulous behaviour, the author's suggestion on such matters becomes creatively and spontaneously realized when both Shish and Mark lose in the election. This is the spirit of poetic justice that runs across all the incidents that smack of deliberate misconduct in Tahidi High.

### **The plague of Naiveté**

Oftentimes, the search for an identity is characterized by naivety that is typical of youths living the years of the Identity vs. Role Confusion Identity Crisis. The choices made by the student characters exhibit this phenomenon. Sometimes it is only when it is already too late that some of the teenagers discover that they took the wrong turning and affiliated themselves to groups or persons they otherwise should not have been with. Once, while on a school camping trip, Kirio assists Ray and Jean-Joyce escape to a hideout in a house they have rented. It is only after they have stayed

in their hideout for days that Kirio realizes that he made a terrible mistake and that in fact he does not fit in a scenario he helped create - where Jean-Joyce and Ray are practically married.

When the scene in the house of the hideout begins, Kirio is discovered in a tense attitude illustrating the seriousness with which he makes the discovery that he may be arrested for kidnapping Jean-Joyce and abetting crime by assisting Ray and Jean-Joyce to elope. He declares that he is moving out of the house. His regret is accompanied by the complaint that he does not see how he fits in a set up whereby Ray and Jean-Joyce are virtually married. He gets torn between remaining loyal to his friends and accepting the truth of the matter that a mistake has been made and that it needs to be righted.

Jean-Joyce's protest against the intention by Kirio "to chicken out" reveals the height of naive idealism. With unsurprising sarcasm and naiveté, the last of which is characteristic of teenage years, she says: "Now King Kong, you are chickening out? They can never find us here!"

Jean-Joyce here alludes to a fictional monster which resembles a gorilla. This creature featured for the first time in the film *King Kong* (1933). This fictitious character is known for its huge size, strength and bravery, features that Kirio is understood by other students to possess.

This should be seen as unrealistic a statement as it actually is. Suddenly, Jean-Joyce seems to think that the world is so big that they can never be found even as she knows fully well that already a few days earlier, Mule had met Ray who told him where they were hiding.

Still on this same matter, most of the students take a naïve stand. Mule is one of them. Despite his intelligence, he is the first one to be in possession of the knowledge on the whereabouts of Kirio, Jean-Joyce and Ray; information he vows never to reveal. Fortunately, he happens to tell his uncle Omosh who insists on forwarding the matter to the Principal Dr. Mutiso, much to Mule's disappointment. Mule's argument is a simplistic one as it is naïve. He wants the information to be concealed because should it be revealed that he is the one who gave the information, he knows he will lose his friendship with the three escapees as well as his respect among the students who he believes will consider him as no less than a traitor. However, his intention to keep the escapade a secret does not negate the fact that he is certainly sure what he is doing is wrong.

Hapa ni vigumu kupata friends, namanzeukisema hii story utakuwa Umeniseti (It is very difficult to make friends here. And please, if you blow up that story you will have betrayed me). It is all about honour.

This is naïveté because he puts what he calls respect among fellow students before the need to solve the school and parents find the missing students. This nature of teenagers is elevated further when Omosh, an adult who appreciates the seriousness of the matter decides to reveal the information.

This revelation leads to the ambush that Dr. Mutiso and Jean-Joyce's father make on the hideout.

### **Teenagers and Responsibility**

Personal growth and the evidence of individual initiative are some of the fundamental issues in human growth and development that are symptomatic of teenage

years. Those teenagers who are beginning to make a commitment to certain identities and roles they would like to play in society begin to show signs of consciousness in relation to issues affecting them and the society they live in. Frankie is the embodiment of this evidence of personal initiative and growth which begins to blossom in precocious school-going teenagers.

Seeing the need for a peer counsellors club in Tahidi High School, Frankie initiates the idea of forming the club. She approaches teacher Chebby and requests her to become the club patron after explaining to her what she proposes to be the role of the club in the school.

Her precocious nature has afforded her the capacity to realize that a student-centered approach to solving students' problems is the best way forward. The club is eventually formed with support from Chebby who appreciates the level of industry and initiative in Frankie telling her: "That is very mature of you".

The success of the group soon becomes a reality when the first client to be counseled presents remarkable change. Kirio, depressed, and lacking an understanding outlet for his problems, walks out of Ngatia's History class one afternoon. Unlike Ngatia who compares the brooding Kirio to the hermit, Marco Polo, Frankie, because of her understanding of a shared teenage identity and of common problems, follows him out. On pretext that she is going to the washrooms, she runs after Kirio and convinces him to sit down for a chat.

A one-on-one chat reveals the physical abuse he faces at home. Kirio does not identify with the rest of their family because of his stepfather. His identity crisis is laid bare when he says of him: "He hates me because I am not his. My brothers and sisters are his."

The result of the talk is that finally Frankie manages to convince Kirio to go back to class, after which he apologizes to Ngatia. From this scenario, we can conclude that part of the solution to teenage identity problems and indiscipline lies in the society's ability to be understanding and its appreciation of the teenage situation. Sometimes, they are not the often elusive wholesome solutions that are needed but rather, an outlet for the pent-up feelings. In Kirio's case, the intense pent-up emotions are an effect of a blend between physical and verbal abuse from a stepfather. As Frankie helps to demonstrate, what teenagers need times of emotional turmoil is a reliable form of release, and not criticism. It is also seen that teenagers can indeed take a responsibility in tackling their identity crises.

In this fashion, Tahidi High has succeeded in demonstrating that undesirable action is not the only trait that school-going teenagers are capable of. Given time and space, the youth can adopt and make a commitment to an identity that allows their sense of enterprise and ingenuity to thrive. In other words, teenagers like being given a chance to be responsible in matters relating to their welfare. This is the kind of a teenager that Frankie is.

The foregoing is proof of a clear sense of initiative in an individual. A critical look at the rest of the students would reveal that sometimes in groups or individually, students can be very innovative. One morning, OJ brings to school news of a primary school child who is his neighbour. Reportedly, he has dropped out of school because parents his cannot afford school uniform. OJ initiates a programme to raise money from fellow students to help buy school uniform for the disadvantaged child.

When other students are told of the purpose of the money, they join OJ to raise money from the students, workers and teachers. Teacher Kirimi helps them re-

alize that instead of collecting money to raise money to help only one child, they could come up with a way of raising money to help many needy children. Once more, at this point, the role of the teacher in appreciating and shaping a sense of responsibility in the students is seen to be critical. Because of Kirimi's suggestions, more ideas come up from the students. They are these ideas that lead them towards organizing a talents show and a beauty contest in the school with the objective of raising money to assist a bigger number of children in their outreach.

A sense of unity of purpose which is worthy of note emerges during this occasion as it does in several other cases Tahidi High. As the students work together in a social cause, it is important to realize once again how teenagers discard their rivalries and disagreements in the face of calamity or a problem facing one of them. This is, however, not to say that the rivalries and disagreements at this point in their lives are minor; they are indeed to them serious but not serious enough to stand in the way of a social cause.

### **Role Modeling: The Role of Adults in Teenage Identity Crises - The Pre-occupation with Celebrity Status**

By the time the children get into the teen years, they normally would already have started a process of identification with those people they look up to in deciding their future roles in their later lives. According to the Encarta Dictionary, a role model is a worthy person who is an example to other people. Students in Tahidi High are not left behind in this all important process of looking up to the people they would like to be like. However, not every teenager in Tahidi High School chooses a model worthy of being copied. There are going to be cases looked at in this section, which are a reflection of misguided choosing of role models.

First to be realized is the identification with those people that the students consider celebrities. These include performing artistes like musicians and, beauty pageants (models). When the idea to raise money for needy children and later for the peer counseling club comes up, the first suggestion that all students agree upon is to have a musician to grace the occasion. They believe that the presence of local contemporary musicians, Rufftone, Nameless and Jua Cali will attract a bigger audience, thus, more money will be realized. After discussions, it is decided that Rufftone is to be invited.

The student community is upbeat in the wake of the good news that Rufftone is coming to Tahidi High School to perform. Nearly all students are eager to give the best impression to the artiste, who they consider their celebrity. The girls spruce themselves up because each one of them would like Rufftone to view her in a favourable light. The stage gets set for supremacy battles especially between girls. Consider the dialogue below. The girls engage in this conversation, each practicing the feminine wiles that are supposed to catch the attention of the musician. Attempts to win over those of the opposite sex are hereby seen as a trait characteristic of the vanity that typifies the nature of girls in the teenage years.

Mary: Will he notice me?  
 Debra: Wait until I wear my bikini. He won't be looking anywhere else!  
 Shish: By the way, he is my friend!

Desirous of impressing on the day of the show, on the eve of the performance,

the girls start practicing the catwalk even during class time. Together with this desire to impress Rufftone, is paired the desire of the girls to bear the identity tag of a beauty queen or a model. Meeting these high objectives often leads to cheating amongst teenagers just as it does happen with Tahidi High School students. Debra is caught attempting to bribe a judge so that she can be voted Miss Tahidi. On other hand, Shish secretly slices Stella's costume so she can get rid of her competition. Debra is disqualified while Shish loses to Stella. At this point, it is necessary to recall a statement already made earlier on. It is in the spirit of poetic justice that both Debra and Shish lose. The Television Drama is in essence educating the youth, albeit in a subtle way, on the virtue of honesty and hard work if they should like to attain their ambitions.

During teenage years, girls' preoccupation with the ideals of beauty reaches its peak. At this time, almost every girl, as it is revealed in Tahidi High, harbours the ambition of becoming a beauty queen. The identity of 'the beautiful' then becomes an achievement girls would like to accomplish. Stella, on the days soon after the beauty contest, becomes a victim of the opportunistic OJ because of her ambition to become a model. The smooth talker he is, he manages to impress it upon Stella that she is so beautiful that she deserves to become a beauty queen on the national stage. OJ also tells her that he has the necessary connections to facilitate the fulfilment of her ambitions. With the promise that he will call the Miss Kenya organizers and link her up, Stella seems to readily fall for OJ. It is a consequence of OJ's persuasion that Stella and OJ are found kissing in a classroom on the same afternoon that Stella leads one side of a school debate in advocating for abstinence. This should signify the sacrifice that girls are willing to make if only to attain the tag of 'the beautiful'.

The boys in the school also have their part in the identification with those they consider celebrities and icons. This explains why Habakkuk complains to his father that he does not buy him 50Cent and G-Unit clothes so that he can be like other boys in the school. It therefore goes without saying that most boys in the school don clothes with the labels of the Black American rap artist. In the same manner, girls in Tahidi High School strive to identify with, and ape, the mannerisms and appearance of those people considered to be celebrities by teenage perception.

The presence of a person they consider a celebrity is marked by euphoria and excitement amongst teenagers, sometimes leading to serious mishaps. In Tahidi High School, this is seen when Rufftone finally shows up at the time when the students are just about to despair that he won't come. The rupture that is witnessed at the time of his performance is testimony to the level to which teenagers appreciate and view their celebrities as iconic figures. Because of the resultant jubilation, even the sore losers of the beauty contest soon forget their losses and join other students in the acclamation of the artistic superiority of their music icon, Rufftone.

### **Adults in Role Modeling**

There are, however, cases of wrong choice of role model to identify with. In the case of school going teenagers, some of those wrongfully selected as role models may be parents, relatives, teachers or other school workers. This is epitomized in Tahidi High School. In most cases, this happens because those influential people in the immediate environment of the teenagers may fail to espouse and show them the best values. The adoption of smoking and drinking by students can therefore be linked to the fact that they see their own teachers smoking and drunk. To a certain extent,

the students start to believe that smoking and drinking is a classy affair and therefore reserved for independent people.

Jean-Joyce once says that she feels like smoking every time she smells Teacher Ngatia smoking. This may then be used to support the view that some of the smokers in the school like OJ, Habakkuk, Kirio, Shish, Jean-Joyce, Freddie and Kirio may have been influenced and gradually driven into addiction by Ngatia. Even those considered to be celebrities oftentimes become paragons of undesirable role modeling. Although a celebrity, in the expected sense of the word, would be read as somebody with positive influences within and without the environment in which they live, cases in Tahidi High indicate a certain mistaking of what celebrity is. In the world of teenagers, a celebrity is anybody popular. To the teenagers, it matters little whether the same person holds traits that are worth imitating. It is against this background that it should be said that Shish is indeed a victim of this kind of undesirable role modeling. This is so, arguing by her own statement that she “feels like one of those Hollywood stars” when she smokes.

Looked at from the perspective that parents can provide negative role modeling, Freddie’s case is even a more piteous one. He has been driven into drugs by influences from both at home and at school. His father, a successful businessman, is addicted to alcohol. He also has no qualms about buying his school going son alcohol. Worse, when once Freddie is sent away from school because he comes while drunk, his father returns him to school even more drunk than his son. Both of them can be seen swigging inside their car in the school compound. Surprisingly, indeed ironically, Freddie’s school mates envy him saying that he has a successful father; a role model to look up to.

One of the students, Ayok, first of all spitefully looks at the antics of Freddie’s drunken father who even insults teachers calling them stupid and dressed in cheap secondhand clothes. That is before he is told of how rich Freddie’s father is, a fact upon which he changes his attitude towards him. He suddenly begins to admire his success, to an extent of remarking: “Freddie must be very proud of him. He has a father who inspires him.”

Ayok’s statement is followed by a rejoinder from Maryanne who holds her aunt in high esteem as her role model. She looks up to her as her role model because of a number of motivations. Defending her choice, she says that her aunt is a young successful lady who has excelled academically. She has a Masters Degree and a well-paying job. These things, Maryanne says, have enabled her to live an independent life: partying through the night and returning home only when she wants. Maryanne declares that she aspires to be like her aunt once she is a holder of a National Identity Card, which signifies becoming an adult and an entry into independent life.

The cases of Maryanne and Freddie bring to the fore one of the most important questions that emerge from the fabric of Tahidi High. What constitutes a role model? Does the level of one’s education and economic endowments automatically qualify one as a role model? The answer to these questions is ‘yes’, unfortunately, for most students.

The environmental (cultural) factors that cause role confusion in the lives of children are together with the above instances revealed to start much earlier in the lives of children. It is only a few that are lucky to get other people in their societies and families upon whom they can model their future roles. Teacher Ngatia’s daugh-



ter, though not a member of the Tahidi High School, can be used to advance the point that teenagers begin getting mixed up early in their lives, and may finally ape wrong role models as a consequence. For her case, it is her mother who stands up for her and ensures that she does not get muddled up in the negative influences of her father. The daughter is said to have called her father “a useless drunkard”.

Taking cue from the above paragraph, the environment in which the teenagers live does not on the contrary absolutely lack people who can provide positive modeling for them. Kibunja, a member of the subordinate staff in Tahidi High School tells Freddie and a few other students a story of his uncle who he holds as his role model. Kibunja’s uncle is British educated and a holder of a PhD but, as Kibunja says, he is humble and not a drunkard. He gives the students this story to counter Ayok’s view that Freddie must be proud of his father, yet the same father drunkenly portrays the contrary.

Another positive influence that counsels students on the importance of thinking critically when identifying with people as role models is Teacher Kirimi. While neither antagonizing Freddie and his father, nor expressing his irritation at having been called a stupid teacher by Freddie’s father, he proves to be the voice of reason insofar as guiding the students in the choice of role models. To Kirimi, a role model should be a person with whom another person identifies not just because of their achievements in life, but because of their enduring qualities of humility, morality and a sense of purpose in life. It is from the words of Kibunja and Kirimi that the students are much more likely to come up with a concrete recipe for coming up with inspiring figures as role models.

Sometimes young people may seek affiliation with people or groups they ought not to, not because of their own doing, but because adults may have a role in this flawed identification. In this regard, the role of teachers in determining who the students identify with and in which manner is examined.

A group of form three students finds Miss Tulele, a new teacher, difficult to respect and keep distance from. This is specifically because the students see no difference between themselves and her with respect to her mode of dressing, her mannerisms and her profuse expression of emotion. The failure by teachers to adhere to a certain minimum standard of expectations can therefore lead to general misconduct, particularly seen in the way the students relate to the teacher.

Miss Tulele dresses in a manner that does not keep safe distance from the romantic imagination of the students, especially the boys. The audience, and indeed Miss Tulele and those of her kind, may lack the moral authority to blame such students, knowing well that curiosity and a sense of adventure affects teenagers.

These particular students pick a love letter written by Teacher Kilunda, addressed to Miss Tulele. Kilunda sneaks the letter into Tulele’s books fearing to approach her directly. Form three students pick and read the letter when it drops in class without Tulele’s knowledge. Later, when teacher Kilunda in a huff goes to punish them because they cannot give Tulele cooperation, he finds the students already armed with knowledge that is going to protect them against punishment.

Teacher Kilunda knows they can easily reveal the details of the letter, exposing him to ridicule. They actually mock him singing a love song when he goes to class and threatens them with severe punishment. Of particular thrill to the teenagers is the opening line in the letter in which Kilunda says that “the sun started shining when you (Miss Tulele) came here to Tahidi High School.” Consequently, they see

parallels between the experiences and conduct of their teachers and liken them to their own. It is by this process that the line between the adults becomes blurred and even disappears. In this incident, the students begin to see the possibility of doing the same things to either of the teachers as the case may be appropriate.

As the episode ends, the students consider themselves in possession of information that puts them in a position to be able to make demands, just as they would make demands to their age mates. They send three representatives to Miss Tulele and three more go to face Mr. Kilunda.

They are those who go to face Tulele that reveal the idea that their inappropriate identification with her, to the extent of viewing her as a potential girlfriend, is a result of her own conduct. Led by Maryanne, they read Miss Tulele what they refer to as "*modus vivendi*" (The Rules of Coexistence). Firstly, they demand that she begins to show them the respect they deserve even if she sees them only as students. Secondly, they commend on her dressing which they term too revealing for them to fail to notice. Besides being a distraction to them in class, Miss Tulele's mode of dressing stands accused for triggering students' emotional interest in her. Joni sums up this important revelation with his weighty comment:

We are after our age mates, but if you give us reasons to undersize you, then you should not blame us!

It is clear by this engagement in dialogue that the students blame Miss Tulele for making some of them imagine that they could get into an intimate a relationship with her or even marry her. One of the students gives a hint of the presence of this kind of imagination in an English class. When asked to form a question, Dan, blurts out "Will you marry me?" Although this may appear an innocent answer to the question, it is actually an expression of a hidden motive among the boys.

Upon being asked if she understands the terms of their demands, Miss Tulele states: "We have an agreement." The students then walk out of the staffroom having triumphed in a battle they take to Miss Tulele. They can be said to have finally resolved the matter that has been disturbing both them and Miss. Tulele. On the other side, Kilunda also reaches an uneasy agreement with the students who reject his punishment retorting that they will not accept to be punished because of his girlfriend, Miss Tulele.

There is yet further evidence of the significant role played by adults, in this case teachers, in enhancing identity crises in teenagers. This is related to the level of closeness and frequency of interaction between students and teachers. Some students have not decided which roles or careers they aspire to take up in future. This type takes advantage of the position or responsibilities of the teachers to posture as those who genuinely need direction in role identification. In reality, their intention is just to get close enough before making their intentions clearly known. Teacher Okello, a games teacher and Dorcas, a student expose such a scenario.

Dorcas approaches Mr. Okello expressing her desire to learn tennis. Soon after, she changes her mind and tells Okello that her initial intention was not in fact to learn tennis but to be taught Mathematics. When asked why she does not understand the subject when in is taught in class, she vaguely says that she does not concentrate in class and adds that the other teachers do not know how to teach the subject. She knows that Mr. Okello does not even teach Mathematics. Even more surprising, is the fact that Okello agrees to help her in the subject despite having no proven expertise in the field. It is this step by the teacher that encourages Dorcas to

draft a love letter addressed to Okello. Although most of the letter is actually incomprehensible because of the girl's intent to impress, it nevertheless suffices to show her intentions:

Dear Mr. Okello. How do you preponderate under the present atmospheric cosmosity? I am just fine, though the symptoms of nature discriminate me from seeing all the...."

According to Teacher Ngatia, more in Okello's character leads to the kind of response exhibited by this girl, and perhaps a few more other girls:

**Ngatia:** When there is a trip, you wear your most expensive cologne; you wear your most fashionable tracksuits. The results being you come hugging the girls after winning. ... I have also noticed that you pretend to give that girl tennis lessons. You know what I know you know, don't you?

**Okello:** That is crap! But ... I would rather spend my money buying expensive cologne and fashionable tracksuits than on alcohol.

What is noticeable here is that Okello does not dispute the validity of Ngatia's accusations but rather, chooses to be defensive and insulting. This attitude is a clear indication of his contribution to the mental conflict within the girls with regard to how they ought to relate to their male teachers.

## Conclusion

This study is based on the premise that a film maker has a wide range of narrative agents to choose from. Film artists discriminate in the choice of both subject – matter and technique. When a screenwriter or film director thus makes a selection, it is assumed that s/he opts for what is best suited to articulate her / his vision or ideological perspectives on a multiplicity of concerns. A film maker's preference in terms of character-types should therefore never be taken for granted but rather should be perceived as a vehicle through which the artist lays bare his/her message. Marjorie Boulton (1954) asserts: "a story ... will achieve an effect on the *audience* by selection of some aspects of the subject" (p.109). Characterization in Film is therefore a deliberate enterprise aimed at achieving certain goals.

One of the primary objectives that this paper has endeavoured to fulfill, is to demonstrate the mimetic nature of film in exposition of the various dilemmas that teenagers face when it comes to choosing the positions they wish to take in their adulthood. The characters under study being teenagers, the paper has attempted to subject the issue of role confusion to analysis. This has taken the shape of an exploration into the confusions that teenagers face as they experiment with the possibilities of finding the suitable roles they can play when their days of school end. With respect to affiliation and the search for a sexual identity, the social conduct of the teenage boy has also been identified. In this connection, the 'bad boy syndrome' is one of the seminal aspects of the secondary school teenage identity that this study interrogated. In the course of this crisis, role modelling stands as one of the central issues. According to Erikson, teenagers can successfully resolve their identity crisis if left alone. In this regard, the study has demonstrated how adults, especially parents, can interfere with the process of role identification in their children.

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