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## Analysis of a Protagonist with Multiple Disabilities in an Ethiopian Film: *Alabedkum* in Focus (I Did not Lose My Mind)

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### Abstract

The study examines how the protagonist with multiple disabilities, Samson, is portrayed in the Amharic film *Alabedikum*. It also analyzes how the film challenges representational biases in Ethiopian cinema. To achieve this, the study employs qualitative methods such as textual and thematic analysis by utilizing mainly on narrative structure, dialogue, though visual presentation is included in a few moments. Critical Disability Theory (CDT) is used as a theoretical framework to analyze both Samson's character and the lived experiences of PwDs in the Ethiopian context. By portraying Samson's agency and intersectional identity, the film primarily critiques the prevailing assumptions towards PwDs. It portrays him as a morally compassionate and resilient person who is committed to supporting marginalized individuals. However, it occasionally perpetuates cultural stereotypes like the "supercrip", ridicule, and violence. The study also addresses the themes of discrimination and social marginalization. Thus, it promotes supportive and culturally responsive narratives to increase awareness of people with disabilities (PwDs). The study calls for more empathetic, intersectional, and inclusive portrayals in Ethiopian context that challenge biased societal attitudes.

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## Introduction

Film serves as a powerful tool for changing attitudes about people with disabilities (PwDs) and forming societal outlooks. The representations of PwDs in films have the potential to significantly influence assumptions, attitudes, and actions of the society by either challenging or reinforcing prejudices in the ground (Davis, 2013; Garland-Thomson, 1997; Mitchell & Snyder, 2000). In disability studies, scholars argue that cultural texts actively construct meanings of the able narratives and present difference rather than reflecting reality (Barnes, 1992).

On the contrary, Films that portray PwDs in a nuanced and accurate manner can increase our empathy and understanding by defending negative stereotypes and promoting inclusivity in different cultural contexts.

Disability is a serious societal problem that impacts a sizable section of the world's population. Approximately 15% of people worldwide live with a disability (World Bank, 2020). Out of this, 10% in Africa (Disabled World, 2024) and 9.3% in Ethiopia (UNICEF, 2018) are experiencing some form of disability. Despite their prevalence, PwDs continue to face systemic discrimination and social marginalization, which are deep rooted in cultural beliefs and structural barriers (Davis, 2013; Longmore, 2003). From a CDT perspective (Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Hosking, 2008), disability results from deeply rooted discriminatory norms and institutionalized power inequalities rather than merely social barriers. Such marginalization aggravates social and economic exclusion of PwDs in Ethiopia and beyond.

In historic courses, stereotypes and myths have shaped our perceptions of people with disabilities (Barnes, 1992). These stereotypes have been portrayed by the historical misrepresentation of the lived experiences of PwDs in literature, art, and film (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Garland-Thomson, 1997). People with disabilities are often excluded from social, political, and economic activities due to a lack of understanding and stereotypes about disability (Albrecht, *et al*, 2001). Cultural perceptions of disability in Ethiopia as a "curse of ancestors" or a "punishment of God" (Rohwerder, 2018, p.5), and these influence film stories by perpetuating stigma instead of encouraging inclusion or empowerment. According to Riley (2005), the depictions of PwDs in films frequently fail to capture the multidimensional character of PwDs, which leads to misinformed societal perceptions.

For long period of time, the disability community and the disability rights movements have advocated for social change by challenging the historically discriminatory practices and exclusionary beliefs about disability (Longmore, 2003; Riley, 2005). Grounded in rights-based and social justice perspectives, these movements have influenced gradual shifts in media representation thereafter. Because of these efforts, the way PwDs are portrayed in films has gradually changed. Films start to show more diversified and positive depiction of PwDs. However, there has not been much improvement, and stereotypes are still prevalent in many film stories, especially in Ethiopian cinema, where representations frequently lack nuance and intersectional viewpoints (Sewalem and Sisay, 2024).

Research on disability in films focused on recurrent themes, such as "active lives of PwDs," "integration of PwDs," "social aid for PwDs," and "discrimination against PwDs" (Atifurrohim, 2022, p. 17). These themes are usually used by researcher to provide a framework for examining film representations and their social outcomes. Due to ongoing discriminatory policies, PwDs in Africa, such as Ethiopia, usually experience structural disadvantages in social and economic affairs (Goche *et al.*, 2019; UN, 2017). Films like *Kibrenek* (2005), *Bandaf*

(2017), and *Samegn* (2017) frequently portray disability in Ethiopia as a cause of shame or a burden for families and communities, which mirrors societal stigmas.

The Ethiopian film industry has grown significantly since the 2000s and is popular with many people, especially younger people (Thomas, 2020). Disability depictions are still few, nevertheless; as the majority of films ignore the variety of disability experiences in favor of concentrating on visual impairments. Characters with disabilities are included in well-known Amharic films such as *Samegn* (2017), *Meda* (2018), and *Kerefede* (2021). However, they frequently lack nuance or intersectional viewpoints to show their real identities. Although disability is receiving more attention in cultural products, there is still a lack of scholarly research on how it is portrayed in Amharic cinema. This study fills this gap by applying Critical Disability Theory to analyze how a protagonist with multiple disabilities is portrayed in the Amharic film *Alabedkum*. It also examines how the film both challenges and reinforces stereotypes and adds to broader discussions of disability in Ethiopian cinema.

### Statement of the Problem

The fact that the global population of PwDs is increasing, has important implications for public awareness and social inclusion (UN, 2017; WHO, 2021). This creates an urgent need to raise awareness about disability, particularly because a significant proportion of cases are potentially preventable through ongoing education and the use of media outlets such as films. Films are effective media for spreading accurate information and encouraging inclusive views of people with disabilities (Shakespeare, 2018). Hence, films can contribute to societal changes in attitudes and actions within culturally particular contexts by promoting empathy and challenging stereotypes through nuanced and accurate portrayals.

Local film productions, particularly those in indigenous languages, possess special capacity to inform audiences about disability in particular social and cultural contexts (Mathe, 2025). Amharic films are popular in Ethiopia and have the potential to significantly influence public perceptions of people with disabilities by challenging local stigmas, including the belief that disability is a result of a divine curse (Rohwerder, 2018). This study examines how the Amharic film *Alabedkum* portrays disability and how such representations may contribute to raising awareness and promoting acceptance of PwDs. Through a culturally relevant lens, this study evaluates the film's impact to promoting greater awareness and acceptance of PwDs by examining how Samson, the protagonist, is portrayed.

To conduct a critical examination of how PwDs are portrayed in Ethiopian cinema is required to reveal hidden prejudices and assumptions. Such analysis informs policymakers about the societal impact of media representations and raises public awareness. Few studies have examined Ethiopian films. Existing research either focuses on a single disability, such as autism (Sewalem & Sisay, 2023), or on non-film texts like disability-related proverbs in education (Melese, 2023). Moreover, no studies have explored the representation of multiple disabilities through a Critical Disability Theory (CDT) perspective, which views disability as a socially constructed identity, despite its increasing presence in cultural products (Hosking, 2008). This gap indicates the necessity of a thorough examination of how films such as *Alabedkum* portray PwDs, taking into account both their capacity to challenge discriminatory narratives and their limitations in sustaining prejudices. By offering a thorough examination of *Alabedkum's* depiction of a character with multiple disabilities, this study seeks to fill this knowledge gap and advance discussions on disability representation in Ethiopian and international cinema.

## General and Specific Objectives

### General objective

This study examines how the Amharic film *Alabedkum* challenges stereotypes against people with disabilities and promotes inclusive representations in Ethiopian cinema, using Critical Disability Theory to analyze Samson, a protagonist with multiple disabilities. It also evaluates how the film may influence public attitudes toward PwDs in Ethiopia through sympathetic, culturally informed narratives.

### Specific Objectives

Based on the above general objective, the study:

1. Examines how *Alabedkum* portrays positive and stereotypical depictions about people with disabilities.
2. Analyzes how Samson, a person with multiple disabilities, is portrayed in relation with emotions, agency and empowerment.
3. Investigates how Samson's experiences reveal societal marginalization and structural injustices in Ethiopia.
4. Evaluates the capacity of the film to represent the lived experiences of people with disabilities and to reveal cultural stereotypes and societal stigmas.

## Review of Related Literature

### The Concept of Disability

The terms of *disability* and *impairment* have different meanings yet are frequently used interchangeably. As opposed to disability, which is the inability to perform tasks necessary for oneself or society due to the impairment or external social barriers, impairment is a physiological condition involving the loss or limitation of physical, sensory, or cognitive function (Berger, 2013; Goodley, 2017). The traditional medical model frames disability as an individual problem rooted in the impairment, which devalues social and environmental factors. In contrast, the social model recognizes that societal barriers and cultural attitudes create disabling conditions than personal limitations. Based on this perspective, Critical Disability Theory further examines the complex interactions between social, cultural, and personal factors to address the limitations of the medical model by offering a more nuanced understanding of disability experiences (Hosking, 2008). This distinction is also significant in cultural contexts like Ethiopia, where social views can increase difficulties faced by people with disabilities (Breffka, 2023).

The lived experiences of PwDs are complex and multidimensional, and are usually influenced by social attitudes, physical barriers, and stigma. Cultural attitudes, resource scarcity, and structural injustices are the roots of discriminatory practices, which cause PwDs to face social, emotional, and physical difficulties (Oliver, 1996; Goodley, 2017; Shakespeare, 2018). African and Global South disability scholarship further strengthens this study by situating disability within local cultural and social contexts. Scholars such as Mutanga (2024) identify that community values and historical dispositions can shape disability experiences. Groce et al. (2011) also note that disability intersects with poverty and structural inequalities in Global South contexts. Ndlovu (2019), on the other hand, focuses on indigenous frameworks that challenge Global North perspectives concerning inclusion and agency. These perspectives enrich the analysis of *Alabedkum*, providing a culturally grounded understanding of disability representation. In Ethiopia, challenges, such as traditional beliefs that frame disability as a "curse" or "retribution of God," worsen the problem (Rohwerder, 2018, p.5). The issue urges the

need for a more thorough understanding of disability as a social construct influenced by both personal circumstances and larger societal dynamics.

### **Stereotypical Depictions of Disability in Films**

Historically, cinematic representations of disability have frequently used the medical or tragedy models, and they promote biased beliefs that prevent people from being included in society (Barnes, 1992; Norden, 1994). Studies explore different stereotypical depictions of PwDs, such as objects of violence, ridicule, “supercrip,” pity, burden, and similar portrayals in films (Barnes, 1992; Norden, 1994), that continue to influence public opinion. Films from non-Western regions, such as Ethiopia, were observed to have biased narratives, which are reinforced by cultural stigmas (Gallego, Ferreira, & Arias-Gago, 2025).

In the “supercrip” stereotype, PwDs are portrayed in films as inspirational individuals with super outstanding skills, such as technical genius, photographic memory, or tremendous strength (Collin, 2022). Even though such portrayals of PwDs seem positive, these types of representations frequently obscure the true identities and experiences of PwDs by imposing unreasonable expectations and distorting their actual realities and true identities (Barnes & Mercer, 2003). According to the critical disability perspective, this depiction has the risk of making PwDs become one-dimensional characters who are only distinguished by their seeming exceptionality. This trend is observed in many African films that include heroic stories ahead of structural obstacles and systemic inequalities (Swarts, 2020). For example, disability studies scholarship shows that disabled characters in films are often portrayed as extraordinary heroes and exceptional abilities in their everyday realities (Barnes, 1992; Norden, 1994).

In films, there is a trend to depict PwDs as victims by the abled persons. Thus, films present the *object of violence* trope by portraying PwDs as defenseless victims of assault, abuse, or mental suffering. To support this, Barnes and Mercer (2003) and Jeffress (2022) note that films often depict non-disabled individuals harming PwDs physically or emotionally, which reinforces feelings of helplessness, weakness, and inferiority figures. Garretta (2019) found that disabled bodies in Iñárritu’s films symbolize social violence and injustice. In addition, Barnes (1992) observed that disabled characters are often shown as victims of physical or social violence. These representations reinforce harmful stereotypes by depicting PwDs as helpless and victims in social narratives.

PwDs serve an entertainment purpose in film depictions. The *object of ridicule* stereotype makes fun of people with disabilities by exaggerating their physical or behavioral characteristics (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Collin, 2022). These representations trivialize PwDs' experiences and reinforce social marginalization by frequently inviting viewers to laugh at or degrade them (Shakespeare, 2018). The study of McRuer (2006) shows that film and television often use disabled characters for humor. This is also a common practice in Ethiopian films such as *Kibrenek* (2005), where victimization is frequently associated with disability.

Such depictions in Ethiopian cinema are consistent with cultural tendencies to marginalize PwDs by reinforcing negative societal sentiments. Hence, they demand a critical examination through CDT.

### **Positive Depictions of Disability in Films**

Positive portrayals of PwDs in films help to remove myths and encourage inclusivity through accurate representation. Films can combat societal prejudices and promote better acceptance by presenting PwDs as strong and complex characters (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000). Particularly in places like Ethiopia, where stigma is still widespread (Breffka, 2023; Shumet et

al, 2024), accurate and compassionate portrayals empower PwDs by promoting positive self-identity and confidence, and societal understanding and acceptance (Goodley, 2017; Shakespeare, 2018).

Films that portray PwDs as role models can support people in developing self-acceptance, overcoming trauma, and attaining subjective well-being and social integration (Bianchi et al., 2021). Furthermore, these depictions help to normalize disability, change public perceptions, and create a more accepting and compassionate society (Davis, 2013; Gupta & Anand, 2020; Jeffress, 2022). Films can challenge the existing biases and promote social change by portraying PwDs as active participants in their stories. However, Ethiopian cinema rarely uses this potential (Sewalem & Sisay, 2024), and this shows there is a problem of portraying PwDs.

In recent times, films have tried to include inclusivity and understanding of people with disabilities with their full humanity (Jeffress, 2022). This trend helps to remove the societal prejudice and stereotypes related to disability issues. On the contrary, such inclusive practices remain significantly limited in the context of African and Ethiopian film industry. Most local films that feature characters with disabilities tend to be scripted and performed by characters with non-disabilities, and are often done without consultation with the disability community (Sewalem & Sisay, 2024). To fill these gaps, this study uses Critical Disability Theory to analyze how a protagonist with multiple disabilities is portrayed in the Amharic film *Alabedkum*, assessing both its contributions to and difficulties within the discourse on disability representation.

### **Theoretical Frame Framework**

This study applies Critical Disability Theory as the lens to analyze the portrayal of disability in the Amharic film *Alabedkum*. CDT is a multidisciplinary and identity-based framework that emphasizes the inclusion, empowerment, and rights of individuals with disabilities, examining disability through cultural, societal, and political lenses (Goodley, 2017; Hosking, 2008).

CDT incorporates different models and approaches, including the social model of disability, which views disability as a societal construct shaped by barriers rather than an inherent impairment (Oliver, 1996). CDT also challenges these structural exclusion and broader societal issues, such as injustice, power differences, and discrimination that shape the lived experiences and representations of persons with disabilities (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Goodley, 2017; Hosking, 2008; Oliver, 1996). Moreover, CDT's rights-based approach addresses societal attitudes toward the inclusion of individuals with disabilities and promotes the ongoing struggle for empowerment, equal recognition, and rights, such as agency, dignity, capability, and resistance to marginalization (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Goodley, 2017). By challenging stereotypes, such as objects of pity, burden, ridicule, or dependence (Barnes, 1992; Norden, 1994), and advocating for inclusivity, CDT promotes the principle of respect for diversity (Hosking, 2008).

Thus, CDT is a valuable framework to evaluate the principles of inclusion, empowerment, and social justice by offering insights into how the film influences societal attitudes toward disability.

## **Methodology of the Study**

### **Methods**

This study utilizes a qualitative approach to examine the portrayal of a character with multiple disabilities in the film *Alabedkum* in both breadth and depth. Specifically, it employs

textual and thematic analysis methods. Textual analysis, particularly narrative-textual analysis, is applied to describe and interpret the narrative development, dialogue, and linguistic constructions of disability, as well as interactions between disabled and non-disabled characters. The film is treated as a cultural text and analyzed through a narrative- and discourse-informed lens, allowing the study to explore how disability is represented within the storylines. This approach also enables an examination of the character's position relative to social norms and how dialogues contribute to the ideological framing of disability. In order to reveal deeper meanings and societal consequences inherent in the film's story, thematic analysis organizes and identifies recurrent patterns and themes, such as stereotyped and favorable portrayals of disability (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **Film Selection Criteria**

The study uses purposive sampling to select *Alabedkum* as the main analytical focus based on two important criteria. First, the film places disability at the center of its narrative and character development, providing a thorough depiction of how society and institutions respond to people with disabilities within an Ethiopian cultural framework. Second, the protagonist lives with multiple disabilities and is portrayed as a complex character, enabling examination of the layered social, institutional, and economic barriers that arise at the intersections of disability. Together, these criteria make *Alabedkum* an ideal case for exploring complex, intersectional representations of disability in Ethiopian cinema.

### **Methods of Data Collection and Procedures of Analysis**

The primary source of data for this study is the Amharic film *Alabedkum*. The researchers systematically examined and made detailed notes on the representation of a character with multiple disabilities through an analysis of the film's narratives, dialogues, and visual elements. The analysis focuses on character depiction, narrative structure, dialogue, performance, and visual representation. Screenshots of selected scenes are used to illustrate specific moments of representation, the main analytical emphasis remains on narrative development and dialogue.

Textual Analysis is applied to describe and interpret the narrative development, dialogue, and linguistic constructions of disability, as well as interactions between disabled and non-disabled characters. The film is treated as a cultural text and analyzed through a narrative- and discourse-informed lens, allowing the study to explore how disability is represented within the storylines. This approach also enables an examination of the character's position relative to social norms and how dialogues contribute to the ideological framing of disability.

Thematic Analysis is conducted using a combination of deductive and inductive coding. Deductive coding draws on concepts from Critical Disability Theory (CDT) and existing literature on filmic representations of disability to establish preliminary analytical categories. Inductive coding is then applied to identify themes that emerge directly from the film, particularly those not fully addressed within the theoretical framework of CDT.

For translation, the researchers apply a combination of formal and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence preserves the exact words and structure of the original text (word-by-word translation), while dynamic equivalence maintains the emotional tone, cultural context, and meaning of the text by adjusting the wording (Nida, 1964).

### **Synopsis of *Alabedkum* Film**

*Alabedkum* (2018), an Amharic film directed by Yuliyana T/Mariam, explores the lives of Samson, a talented architect who deals with the difficulties of having multiple disabilities,

including speech difficulty and physical impairments in one hand and one leg. Samson, who was raised with a hot-tempered kid. However, due to his father's lessons, he later develops into a kind and understanding person and learns how to solve disputes peacefully. He suffers from being a social outcast in his neighborhood because he supports marginalized street residents. However, on the ground, he is committed to helping them. Samson rescues a harassed woman named Marta and takes her into his house. Samson shows his kindness to provide unconditional care by marrying Marta and embracing her kid, Abigiya, as his own despite her miserable past and her pregnancy with another man's child. In the episode, Samson's ex-lover, whom he had rejected, unjustly accuses him of attempting rape and sentences him to two years in prison. Samson's life is disrupted. Marta starts to behave coldly toward him during his hard time, and her emotional distance grows. Samson also experiences more social stigma after he is released from jail. Particularly he is harassed at work by colleagues Eskinder and Bereket. This alienation is worsened by his connections with homeless people, However, he is respected by his boss and others for his outstanding professional skills, which grants him to stay in his workplace. After having an affair with Bereket when Samson was imprisoned, Marta finally moves out of Samson's house to live with Bereket. As their relationship declines, Marta returns to Samson and burns Bereket's money that she obtained illegally. In the last pivotal scene, Bereket confronts them with a gun. In a heroic act, Samson defends Marta in a heroic act and is shot and killed. *Alabedkum* confronts the existing stereotypes by featuring Samson's courageous, moral compassion, and professional skill. It also shows the protagonist's strength and kindness in the face of hardship due to social marginalization and systemic exclusion in Ethiopian society.

### Analysis and Interpretation

#### The Title *Alabedkum* and the Social Construction of 'Madness'

In the Amharic film *Alabedkum*, the protagonist, Samson, a character with multiple disabilities, confronts dehumanization and social shame in an Ethiopian cultural setting. His fight against marginalization is at the heart of the story, offering insightful commentary on disability, societal perceptions, and structural injustices. *Alabedkum* positions itself as a major contribution to Ethiopian cinematic discourse by challenging audiences' discriminatory assumptions about disability, mental stability, and social justice through Samson's experiences.

The title *Alabedkum* represents Samson's unwavering resistance, by stating “ሁሉም እንደዚያ ነው የሚለው። እብዶች ባሉበት አንድ ጤነኛ ካለ እሱም እብድ ነው።” (Everyone says so. If there's one sane person among the mad people, he's mad too.) (Yuliyān T/Mariam, 2018, 01:23:33–01:23:43), to social criticism that labels him as "mad" because of his physical and speech disabilities as well as his nonconformity with accepted norms. It supports his claim of agency and mental clarity in the face of discrimination, which is consistent with the focus of CDT on disability as a socially constructed identity (Hosking, 2008). By using this title to frame the story, the movie presents Samson's moral and intellectual integrity by presenting his viewpoint as a direct response degrading the views and labels placed upon him.

The society perceives Samson's actions, especially his support for homeless people, as proof of instability or insanity, which is made worse by his speech problems and physical disabilities in one hand and one leg. The community representative responses to Samson, “ወሮበላ እንርዳ ይለኛል?” (“He is suggesting we help a thug?”) (Yuliyān T/Mariam, 2018, 00:49:20–00:49:22), evidences his solidarity to the marginalized section and labels him to be odd. *Alabedkum* exposes the shortcomings in these cultural assumptions by presenting Samson's intellect as perceptive, intelligent, and sensitive to social reality. He challenges Ethiopian cultural

stigmas that link disability with deficiency because of his strong awareness, which allows him to see the hypocrisy, moral decay, and structural injustices that marginalize disadvantaged populations (Goche *et al.*, 2019; Rohwerder, 2018).

Samson is depicted as an architectural genius with strong moral character; the film at times risks portraying him as an extraordinary figure who overcomes his challenges through extraordinary achievements. To support this portrayal, Samson's boss affirms his professional competence during a conversation with Berket, stating, “አየህ ለዛ ነው የምፈልገው። ብዙ አለምዓቀፍ ውድድሮች ላይ ተወዳድሮ ብዙ ክብሮችንና በርካታ የገንዘብ ሽልማቶችን ያገኘ አርክቴክት ነው።” (“You see, that's why I need him. He's an architect who has won several international competitions and earned substantial cash prizes”) (Yuliyana, 2018, 00:08:15–00:08:26). In line with CDT's critique the systems that privilege non-disabled bodies, thus the film uses Samson to condemn a society that equates physical difference with inferiority (Goodley, 2017).

Therefore, rather than being mentally unstable, Samson challenges social conventions because he is acutely aware of social injustices and is not "mad." His keen awareness of the inequalities embedded in Ethiopian social systems forms the foundation of his nonconformity (Breffka *et al.*, 2023; Iyassu & McKinnon, 2021). The movie implies that Samson's viewpoint is a conscious denial of unfair conventions, presenting disability as a social critique tool rather than a personal constraint.

An intersectional identification based on common experiences of rejection, invisibility, and poor judgment is shown in his relationship with marginalized street people. Because Samson identifies with those who are equally marginalized by society, as the community representative claims to the police officer, “መቸስ ያለ ምንም ምክንያት አንድ ትልቅ የተባለ ኢንጅነር የሆነ አላማ ከለለው በስተቀር ሚስትና ልጆቹን ትቶ ከዱርየዎች ጋር ሲደልት አይውልም።” “Imagine he is a great engineer, leaving his wife and children to spend time with thugs unless he has a certain purpose.” (Yuliyana, 2018, 00:01:21- 00:01:29). This link strengthens the film's examination of disability in addition to class and social marginalization (Hosking, 2008). By highlighting their common humanity and resilience in the face of institutional marginalization, *Alabedkum* humanizes Samson and the homeless people through this bond.

Expanding upon this viewpoint, the analysis uses Critical Disability Theory to explore how *Alabedkum* handles both positive and stereotypical depictions of disability. Samson's architectural genius indicates the risk of portraying him as an exceptional character who overcomes his disadvantages with exceptional performance. This trope is a cliché that the movie occasionally uses to portray PwDs (Davis, 2013). According to CDT, this stereotype reinforces a biased expectations by suggesting that people with disabilities need to achieve superhuman accomplishments in order to gain respect (Brylla, 2018). Furthermore, depictions of PwDs as victims or objects of violence are consistent with Samson's experiences of harassment at work and his false imprisonment, which can reinforce narratives that minimize their pain (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Jeffress, 2022).

*Alabedkum* challenges the storylines of normality (Davis, 2013), by portraying Samson as a multidimensional character and by constructing disability to make criticism of social injustices, despite these clichéd aspects. To support this, CDT notes that the movie portrays disability as a place of awareness and resistance rather than a personal constraint (Hosking, 2008). Thus, the view that connecting disability with lower competence is challenged by Samson's agency, emotional depth, and solidarity with homeless people. His relations portray him as socially

embedded and, as noted by Davis (1995), the film presents disability as a lens through which to view structural injustices in Ethiopian society.

By presenting Samson’s story, *Alabedkum* tries to compromise the conflict between stereotyped and positive representations of disability. *Alabedkum* contributes to broader discussions on disability representation in Ethiopian and international cinema by presenting Samson's mental brilliance, defiance, and solidarity with the marginalized sections. To this end, it encourages viewers to challenge social norms and acknowledge the resilience and humanity of those who are categorized as "other".

**Stereotypical Portrayals of Disability**

Stereotypical portrayals of disability manifest in the depiction of Samson, the main character with multiple disabilities in the Amharic film *Alabedkum*. Samson is depicted as a “supercrip” stereotype. In addition, it depicts him as the target of violence and to a lesser degree, ridicule. These depictions show that *Alabedkum* reveals the existing stereotypes, in which CDT critiques disability as a socially created identity (Hosking, 2008). Within Ethiopia's cultural context, where disability is sometimes interpreted as a form of supernatural punishment, the film reinforces these clichés, reflecting how entrenched societal beliefs contribute to the marginalization of people with disabilities (Rohwerder, 2018).

**Supercrip**

The “supercrip” stereotype presents people with disabilities as heroic for overcoming their limitations via remarkable accomplishments, suggesting that their accomplishments prove their value (Brylla, 2018). This stereotype is emphasized in *Alabedkum* by Samson's portrayal as a gifted architect, while colleagues Eskinder and Bereket wonder, how can someone like him can achieve so much. This conversation, which CDT criticizes for maintaining irrational expectations, displays the abled people surprise at Samson's proficiency (Goodley, 2017). *Alabedkum*, however, responds to this by emphasizing Samson's criticism of social injustices in Ethiopia and contextualizing his accomplishments within his sympathy with homeless people (Goche *et al.*, 2019). This stereotype is demonstrated in a conversation at work:

እስከንድር:- ሳምሶንን የሚያከል ከባድ ወንጀለኛ እዚህ መስሪያ ቤት ውስጥ ችግር አይፈጥርም?  
 አለቃ:- እሱ እስርቤት በገባ በሁለት ዓመት ውስጥ ብዙ ሰራተኞችን ቀያይረናል። እንደሱ ቦታውን ሸፍኖ ሊሰራ የሚችል ምንም ሰራተኛ ልናገኝ አልቻልንም። ደግሞ ትንሽ ያመዋል ልበል?  
 በረከት:- ሲፎግር ነው። እስኪ ልብ ብለህ ተመልከተው፤ አንድም ቀን እንኳን ከሚሰራው ስራ ላይ ምንም ዓይነት ‘ሚስቴክ’ አይሰራም።  
 አለቃ:- አየህ ለዛ ነው የምፈልገው። ብዙ አለምዓቀፍ ውድድሮች ላይ ተወዳድሮ ብዙ ክብሮችንና በርካታ የገንዘብ ሽልማቶችን ያገኘ አርክቴክት ነው። እሱ ከወጣ በኋላ ነው ይህ ቅርንጫፋችን የተፍረከረከው። ከዚያ ላይ አልፎ የእናንተን ስራ ይሰራል።

Eskinder: Wouldn't a dangerous criminal like Samson cause a problem in this office?  
 Boss: In the two years since he went to prison, we've hired different employees to fill his position, but none could replace him. Besides, isn't he a bit crazy?  
 Bereket: He's just pretending. Watch him closely,he doesn't make a single mistake in his work, not even for one day.  
 Boss: You see, that's why I need him. He's an architect who has won several international competitions and earned substantial cash prizes. After he left, this

branch office started losing its status. He's even covered your work.  
(Yuliyana T/Mariam, 2018, 00:07:44–00:08:33)

This dialogue highlights Samson's extraordinary skill and widespread renown as an architect, despite his colleagues' doubts and his boss's dismissive remark questioning his mental and emotional stability. In a reality, he is healthy and competent enough to manage himself and lived with peacefully. This portrayal reinforces the idea that PwDs must exhibit extraordinary abilities to prove their worth, and it perpetuates the stereotype of “supercrip” that their value is contingent on being exceptional (Goodley, 2017). This representation runs the danger of marginalizing PwDs who encounter structural obstacles without attaining such exceptionalism in Ethiopia, where disability is frequently viewed as a divine punishment (Rohwerder, 2018).

In a consultancy meeting, the chief praises Samson's architectural work: “ይህ የምታዩት ህንጻ ምትሃት አይደለም፤ በአፍሪካዊው አርክቴክት ሳምሶን ገብሬ እጅ የተሰራ የጭንቅላት ውጤት ነው።” (“This edifice is a marvel designed by the African architect Samson Gebre—it's not magic,” 00:25:06–00:25:19). The narrative elevates his work to something super human achievement as Collin, (2023) noted in his description of “supercrip”. Although it emphasizes Samson's intelligence despite his speech and physical disabilities, this representation runs the risk of establishing unattainable expectations for PwDs. Thus, it may lead people to create unrealistic standards and pressure to PwDs. Such narratives, according to CDT, deflect attention from systematic injustices, especially in Ethiopia (Breffka *et al.*, 2023; Iyassu & McKinnon, 2021), and they may exclude others by implying that only exceptional PwDs are recognized.

### **Object of Violence**

Samson, a protagonist in the Amharic film *Alabedkum*, who suffers from psychological trauma and has physical impairments in one leg and one hand as well as a speech disability, exemplifies the stereotype of people with disabilities as victims of abuse. This cliché is best illustrated in a conversation between Marta and Bereket, in which Marta, influenced by social prejudices, casts doubt on Samson's value by stating, “አንዳንዴ በሌብነት ከሚጠረጠሩ ሰዎች ጋር አየዋለሁ።” (“Sometimes I see him with people suspected of theft”) (Yuliyana T/Mariam, 2018, 00:06:33–00:10:34). Critical Disability Theory, which sees disability as a socially constructed identity influenced by systemic causes (Hosking, 2008), is used to analyze this portrayal. It reveals the conflict between Samson's resilient humanity and existing assumptions. Thus, *Alabedkum* removes these myths and critiques social injustices in Ethiopia by demonstrating Samson's resistance through his moral integrity and sympathy with the marginalized street people (Yohannes *et al.*, 2023; Zewude *et al.*, 2023).

A key scene depicts Samson as a target of psychological harassment:

ማርታ:- ይቅርታ አድርግልኝና አንዳንዴ ወንጀለኛ መሆኑን እንኳን ማመን ያቅተኛል። በጣም ልነጣርህ አልችልም፤ በጣም ይለያል።

በረከት:- ምኑን ይለያል፤ የሆነ ሞጋጋ አይደል እንዴ? ቆይ ግን አንች የእውነት አፈቀርሽው?

Marta: Forgive me; sometimes I can't even believe he is a criminal. I can't really tell you much; he's so unique.

Bereket: What's unique about him? He is just a deformed fool. But wait, did you really love him?

(Yuliyana, 2018, 00:06:08–00:06:21)

This dialogue reveals that Samson faces psychological harassment from his cloth persons due to his disability. Bereket's degrading comment, calling Samson a “deformed fool,” reinforces negative stereotypes that diminish PwDs by minimizing their value and reducing them to their disabilities. His doubts about Marta's love for Samson are reflections of a larger cultural prejudice that PwD partnerships are less real or acceptable. Such representations are criticized by critical disability theory for supporting ableist narratives that minimize the agency and worth of PwDs by casting them as objects of contempt or sympathy.

In contrast, Martha challenges the view of Bereket by referring Samson with respect and recognizing he has unique qualities. To emphasize her belief in Samson's special traits and her rejection of his criminal label, she frequently uses the Amharic qualifier “በጣም” (very or so). She even has doubts that others consider him involved in criminal activities. She believes Samson is innocent, and does not commit any illegal practices. *Alabedkum* depicts this contrast to reveal the tension between recognizing the humanity of PwDs and societal biases that devalue them. Hence, the film's critique of societal biases that marginalize PwDs is represented through the contrast between Bereket's prejudice and Marta's advocacy. As CDT proposes, the community solidarity is vital to fight the existing stereotypical narratives against disability (Hosking, 2008).

A childhood flashback sequence from *Alabedkum* shows that Samson, a young child with multiple disabilities, is brutally attacked by neighborhood peers due to his choices for peace and love:

ሳምሶን:- እናንተ መጣላት ብቻ ነው እንዴ የምታውቁት፤ እናንተ ፍቅር አታውቁም? ሰላም አታውቁም? እኔ አልጣላም፤ ከፈለጋቼህ ምቹኝ።

የሰፈር ልጆች:- ካልተደባደብክ ሁላችንም ነው የምንቀጠቅጥህ። [ደብዳቤ ይጀምራሉ]

Samson: You only know how to fight, don't you know love? Don't you know peace? I don't fight. If you want, hit me.

Neighborhood kids: If you don't fight, then we'll all beat you up. [**They start beating him up**]

(Yuliyani, 2018, 0:45:50-00:46:10)

The young kid, Samson, expressed his belief in peace and love over aggression. However, he faced a group of physical violence from neighborhood children. Samson's response, “I don't fight. If you want, hit me,” indicates that he has a firm stand not to fight back with the neighboring kids. His action was not taken positively, and he is tragically being beaten by his peers. This moment indicates that PwDs are often seen as weak or non-defending, and thus, they are easy targets for bullying and exclusion. As stated by CDT (Goodley, 2017), the power differences present in these interactions also draw attention to the structural vulnerabilities that PwDs encounter in unsupportive social settings in the Ethiopian context. At the same time, the film portrays the non-violent action of Samson as a quiet but profound form of resistance. However, the scene also risks reinforcing stereotypes of PwDs as helpless victims.

In a moment captured in photos at timestamps 00:53:04 and 00:53:14, Samson's ex-lover invites him to her house on the guise of talking about a significant issue in an attempt to coerce him into resuming their relationship while ignoring his established private life. She tries to harass him sexually, which is not what he expected. The movie exposes societal prejudices that see PwDs as vulnerable to exploitation by making Samson the object of ex-lover's manipulation. It also offers a chance to examine Samson's courage to defend himself from these abuses:



Image 1: 00:53:04



Image 2: 00:53:14

The portrayal of Samson as unable to resist her advances reinforces the stereotype that PwDs lack the agency to keep their boundaries or defend themselves. This representation is consistent with critical disability theory's criticism of stories that suggest PwDs have less ability to set their own boundaries and are therefore PwDs are seen as easy targets for exploitation (Barnes & Mercer, 2003). This portrayal indicates the prejudices in society that make PwDs vulnerable to exploitation, but it also offers a chance to look at Samson's courage to deal with such violations.

Additionally, it is shown in the scenes that follow that Samson, the main character, is the victim of violence:



Image 3: 01:29:54



Image 4: 01:29:55

Samson tries to break up a violent fight between Bereket and Marta in a situation that is seen in photos with timestamps 01:29:54 and 01:29:55. He steps in as Bereket threatens Marta, but Bereket shoots him. The stereotype of people with disabilities (PwDs) as victims of violence is exemplified by Bereket's violent behavior of pulling a gun on Samson. Critical disability theory criticizes this trope for perpetuating cultural narratives that propagate vulnerability (Jeffress, 2022).

Although Samson's moral agency is indicated by his bravery and compassion in stepping in, this portrayal runs the risk of reinforcing the notion that PwDs are less able to face threats, making them vulnerable to damage. By contrasting Samson's agency with his victimization, the portrayal of his vulnerability and the terrible result of his intervention highlight how PwDs are often associated with a lack of self-defense in film representations of disability, which further complicates the story.

### ***Ridicule***

In the film, the depiction of ridicule shows the detrimental effects of prejudice, where people with disabilities are not understood but are instead considered as objects of ridicule (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Collin, 2022). For example, there are many examples of mockery in *Alabedikum*. The mockery he experiences because of his speech and physical impairments is encapsulated in Samson's words, “እነሱ እኮ እያሾፉብኝ ነው።” (“They are making fun of me”). (Yuliyana, 2018, 00:29:18–00:29:21). When Samson was younger, he used this phrase when

speaking to his father, who had accused him of fighting with his friends. Based on CDT perspective, the act of ridiculing by the children shows that Samson's disabilities are portrayed as something to be laughed or joked at rather than acknowledging it with respect (Shakespeare, 2018).

When Marta was with Bereket and she got sick, Bereket insisted her to go back to and rejoin with Samson, her husband. The disparaging statement made by Bereket, “...ይልቁንስ ሳይብስብሽ እዛ ጅል ብጋ ትሄጅ ነው የሚሻልሽ” (“...anyway, it would be best if you went to that fool before it gets worse”), exemplifies how PwDs are ridiculed or labeled as ‘fools’ (Yuliyana, 2018, 01:13:19–01:13:21). Samson's dignity is undermined, and he is portrayed as weak and unwanted by the usage of the label “fool”. CDT argues that this portrayal has the risk of reinforcing harmful stereotypes to the society that PwDs are considered as silly, less capable, and unworthy of making meaningful relationships with their partners (Barnes & Mercer, 2003).

Furthermore, Samson overhears in their office when Eskinder and Bereket discussing about Bereket’s secret relationship with Samson’s wife. The betrayal of Samson’s wife creates deep personal turmoil for him, and he responds by attempting to shift his focus away from the situation. On the other hand, Samson’s colleagues ridicule him that undermines his dignity and authority, as a person with multiple disabilities. In the conversation that follows:

ሳምሶን:- ስራ እንስራ፤ ስራ እንጨርስ።

እስከንድር:- ቆይ አንተ ተብታባ፤ እኛን ልትመከር ትፈልጋለህ? መጀመርያ ሂድና የራስህን ጉድ አጥና!

በረከት:- ሃሃሃ

Samson: Let’s do the work. Let’s finish work.

Eskinder: Wait, you stutter! Are you trying to advise us? First, go and sort out your own miserable life!

Bereket: Hahaha

(Yuliyana, 2018, 0:41:38-00:41:53)

Samson calmly begs his colleagues to focus on their work and finish their duties. The response of Samson was not with anger, but his words reflect a dignified attempt to maintain professionalism. However, Eskinder immediately ridicules him by mocking Samson's speech with the insult “you stutter” and ridiculing his agency by saying “go sort out your own miserable life”. This ridicule is not just about Samson’s stutter but is also a deliberate attack to belittle him, particularly in line with his impairment that he unknowingly enduring. Bereket’s laughter after Eskinder insults of Samson shows that they are making fun due to his speech disability. Their act of mocking Samson's speech style and not accepting his effort to keep calm the situation reflects that PwDs like Samson are ridiculed and their cases are put side. Therefore, *Alabedkum* portrays Samson's disabilities as something to be laughed or joked at rather than fully acknowledging it with respect (Shakespeare, 2018).

## Positive Portrayals

### *Moral Integrity and Selflessness*

*Alabedikum* portrays Samson, the protagonist with multiple disabilities, in a positive manner. He is shown to be a person of integrity, strength, and kindness. The movie depicts these attributes in a number of moments. For example, the boss of the company chooses to fire Eskinder after growing impatient with his leniency and poor work performance. However,

Samson intervened and begged the boss not to do so, saying he would rather leave the job than see his friend fired. The dialogue between Samson and his boss indicates Samson selflessness and compassion:

አለቃ:- በቃ ጨርሻለሁ ውጣልኝ። ጨረሰኩ እኔ።  
 ሳምሶን:- እሱ ከሚወጣ እኔ እወጣለሁ። አታስወጣው።  
 አለቃ:- ሳምሶን፣ ሃላፊነቱን ትወስዳለህ?  
 ሳምሶን:- መስራት ይችላል እንደ ድሮው። መስራት ይችላል።  
 አለቃ:- ለሁለተኛ ጊዜ የመጨረሻ መስጠንቀቂያ።

Boss: Enough! I’ve run out of patience. Get out. I’m done with this.  
 Samson: I’ll leave instead. Don’t fire him.  
 Boss: Samson, are you willing to take responsibility for this?  
 Samson: He can still do the work. He’s capable.  
 Boss: This is your final warning—for the second time.  
 (Yuliyana, 2018, 00:44:04–00:44:36)

Samson is subjected to harassment by his colleague, Eskinder. However, he responds with a strong sense of self-respect and determination. The action of Eskinder reflects a common form of discrimination, whereas Samson’s reaction challenges these negative reactions. The words of Samson, “He can still do the work. He is capable,” reflects his confidence to teach his colleague in a positive manner. Samson’s firm stand asserts that PwDs are just as capable as anyone else to manage and resolve a conflict. Samson rejects the notion that disability equates to incapacity. It reinforces the importance of offering support, holding belief, and showing respect to PwDs, as CDT stands for the dignity and agency of PwDs (Goodley, 2017).

Similarly, Samson's dialogue with Eskinder, in which he declines a promotion to Tokyo in favor of his colleague, further demonstrates his integrity and self-respect. His selflessness is evident in the exchange:

እስክንድር:- ተረጋጋና አስብበት...ብዙ ነገር አድርገህልኛል። ገና ለገና የጠፋውን ስምህን ለማደስ ብለህ አጉል መስዋትነት አትከፈል።  
 ሳምሶን:- እኔ ስሜ አልጠፋም፤ ሳምሶን ነው። አንተ ብትሄድ ይሻላል። አንተ ጎበዝ ነህ። ደግሞም በስራህ፣ በሰዎች ደስተኛ አይደለህም።

Eskinder: Calm down and think over it... You’ve already done so much for me. You don’t have to make unnecessary sacrifices just to restore your tainted name.  
 Samson: My name has not been tarnished. It still is Samson. You had better go. You’re brilliant. Besides, you’re not happy with the people around you and your job.  
 (Yuliyana, 2018, 01:04:18–01:04:44)

Samson is not a man of revenge and does not consider what Eskinder did on him. He passes his chance of promotion to higher position to him. Thus, the refusal of Samson to sacrifice his principles for social approval indicates his high moral value. The response of Samson to Eskindir, “My name has not been tarnished. It still is Samson”, indicates his high self-esteem and self-worth. Samson has firm stand to protect his values rather than seeking to prove him to society for dignity and external recognition. Samson empathy is clearly demonstrated when he recognizes Eskindir’s dissatisfaction and urges him to pursue the new promotion that brings him

fulfillment. Thus, Samson emerges as a symbol of strength, offering inclusive and dignified representation of disability (Barnes & Mercer, 2003).

**Compassionate and Inclusive Leadership**

Samson's care of his housemaids is another illustration of his compassion and kindness. Marta notes: “ሳምሶን እያለ ... በጣም ያቀብጣቸዋል። አብረው ነው የሚበሉት፤ አብረው ነው የሚጠጡት። ከዚያ ትንሽ ቆይተው ሲነግሯቸው አይሰሙም።” (“With Samson around... he over familiarizes himself with them [the housemaids]. He eats and drinks with them. And, a while later, they begin to disobey.”) (Yuliyan, 2018, 00:55:52–00:56:01). Samson actions indicate that he values and respect everyone, regardless of their social standing or role. Though Marta criticizes his generous treatment of the housemaids as “unnecessary,” this critique reflects a cultural tension between traditional views on hierarchy and Samson’s inclusive approach to relationships between employees and housemaid.

**Social Responsibility and Justice**

Furthermore, the community representative went to Samson’s house to inform him that he was trying to organize the local community members for a discussion on security issues and to propose the removal of street youths and thugs by the local administration. Their discussion indicates that Samson’s compassion and his belief in the inherent worth of every human being, regardless of social status, as shown below:

የማህበረሰብ ተወካይ፡- ያው ታውቀዋለህ፤ በየመንገዱ የሚያድሩ ወጣቶችና ወሮቦሎች በዝተዋል።  
ሳምሶን፡ ወሮቦላ ሰው እኮ ነው አይደል?  
የማህበረሰብ ተወካይ፡- አ? እንደዚህ ነው። ወረዳው የተወሰኑ ደንቦችን ቢመድብልን፤ መንገድ ላይ የሚተኙትን እንዲያነሳልን አቤት ለማለት ነው።  
ሳምሶን፡- ታዲያ ወሮቦላን ከማባረር ኑሮቸውን መቀየር አይቻልም? እነሱ እኮ ሰው ናቸው።...  
የማህበረሰብ ተወካይ፡- በል ተወው ማናውቅ መሰለው። እናውቃለን ማንነትህን። ወሮቦላ እንርዳ ይለኛል?

Community representative: You know there are many youths and thugs who spend the night on the streets.  
Samson: A thug is still a human being, isn't he?  
Community representative: Yes, something like that. Well, we are applying for the district officials to have them removed from the streets.  
Samson: Wouldn't it be better to transform the lives of these individuals rather than simply remove them? They are human, after all.  
Community representative: Forget it. You think we don't know. We know who you are. He is suggesting we help a thug?  
(Yuliyan, 2018, 01:48:32–01:49:22)

Samson demonstrates a strong moral compassion since he stands beside the marginalize section. He advocates for the transformation of individuals labeled as “thugs” rather than to displease them from their streets they considered them as a home. The community representative determines on exclusion rather than offering opportunities for growth or redemption for these group. However, Samson's believes to change the lives of these street people and this indicates his empathy and commitment to social progress. Thus, this moment portrays Samson’s resilience, humanity, and commitment to positive social changes. Therefore, Samson challenges the conventional response of simply removing or ignoring them, as the representative of the

community believes. As CDT suggests, he, rather, offers a more sympathetic and transformative approach for dealing with societal issues (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Davis, 1995).

**Lived Experiences of People with Disabilities**

This section examines how people's life experiences are influenced by their impairment, especially in relation to the emotional and social aspects of such experiences. It also explores the barriers, discrimination, and complex relationships that PwDs face due to prejudice.

*Emotional and Social Dimensions*

The film shows how Samson's connections and interactions with others are shaped by the intersection of emotional and social factors in his existence. For instance, when Samson is greeted by his employer after being released from prison:

አሊቃ:- እንኳን ደህና መጣህ ስራውን ከፈለከው ያው ቦታው ክፍት ነው ብዬ ነው። ደግሞ ያችን የጀመርካትን ፕሮጀክት ጨርስ።  
ሳምሶን:- እሽ።  
አሊቃ:- ለየት ያለ ስራ ስለሆነ እንዳሰብከው ከጨረስከው ያው የጎደፈውን ስምህን ያድስልህል።  
ሳምሶን:- ነገ እመጣለሁ፤እሽ?

Boss: Welcome back. If you are ready to work, your position is still open. Besides, finish the project you have already started.  
Samson: Okay.  
Boss: Since it is a unique project, if you accomplish it as planned, it will help restore your damaged reputation.  
Samson: I will come tomorrow, okay?  
(Yuliyān, 2018, 01:11:56–00:12:16).

The message of the boss shows that Samson’s return and the probability to “restore” his reputation. It indicates the tendency of the broader society to evaluate the value of PwDs by their productivity. Although non-disabled people may also be subject to similar expectations, PwDs frequently must challenge the assumption of dependency and inadequacy. The scene demonstrates how Samson's worth is framed in terms of both finishing a task for work and demonstrating his capacity to overcome social stigma through his job achievements. From a CDT perspective, it reflects a cultural tendency to overlook the personal challenges that PwDs may face during reintegration in favor of productivity and professional success (Goodley, 2017).

The emotional conversations of Samson with his wife reflect the emotional and relational complexity of his life:

ማርታ:- ቆይ አንዴት እንደዚህ ልትለኝ ቻልክ?  
ሳምሶን፤- ስለምወድሽ ነው።  
ማርታ:- ስለምትወደኝ ብቻ አይመስለኝም። የሆነ ነገር አስበሃል።

Marta: Wait, how could you say this to me?  
Samson: Because I love you.  
Marta: I don’t think it’s only because you love me. You must think something else.  
(Yuliyān, 2018, 00:27:23–00:27:31).

Marta questioned the intention of Samson by suspecting that his feelings go beyond mere love. On the other hand, the response of Samson, “Because I love you,” indicates his deep

affection towards his wife. The suspicion of Marta shows that her insecurity and distrust might be possibly fueled by the challenges they have faced during his imprisonment. This is possibly due to Marta’s own internal conflicts and possible guilt from her betrayal of having love affairs with Bereket. However, the dialogue indicates Samson is suffering from the emotional challenges resulting from his wife's betrayal. This type of portrayal reflects what CDT matters that disability is connected with the social stigma and problems in family and relationship issues (Shakespeare, 2018).

The film also portrays the social and emotional marginalization experienced by children with disabilities. Samson’s dialogue with his father reveals that he was shunned and ridiculed by his peers during his early childhood:

ሳምሶን:- ...ለምንድነው ካንተ ጋር እዚህ ቤት ውስጥ ብቻየን ‘ምቀመጠው:: ለምንድነው ምትጨቁነኝ:: ልጅህ አይደለህም እንዴ?  
 አባት:- ለምንድነው ታዲያ ወጥተህ ከኩዮችህ ጋር ሁሌ ምትጣላው:: ስንቴ ነው የመከርከህ?  
 ሳምሶን:- እነሱ እኮ እያሾፉብኝ ነው::  
 አባት:- እና ቢያሾፉብህ ከእነሱ እንደምትሻል ማሳየት ነው እንጅ:: እኔ ካንተ የሚበልጡትን ሰዎች ምታሸንፍባትን ጥበብ እሰጥሃለሁ:: ከዚያ ታላቅ ሰው ትሆናለህ:: እስኪ ገምት ምን ይመስልሃል::  
 ሳምሶን:- ሸጉጥ?  
 አባት:- ተሳስተሃል:: ፍቅር ነው:: ፍቅር የማያሸንፈው ነገር የለም:: ይቅርታ ፍቅር ስላላስተማርኩህ::  
 Samson: ... Why am I sitting here alone in the house with you? Why are you repressing me? Am I not your son?  
 Father: Then why do you keep fighting with your peers? How many times did I advise you?  
 Samson: They are the one who made fun of me.  
 Father: So if they make fun of you, show them that you’re better than they are, but not fighting. I will give you the wisdom to win those who are bigger than you. Then, you will become a great person. Can you guess what it is?  
 Samson: A gun?  
 Father: No, you’re wrong. It is love. There’s nothing that love can’t conquer. I’m sorry I haven’t taught you about love.  
 (Yuliyana, 2018, 00:29:00-00:29: 56)

Samson expresses his deep sense of isolation and frustration. His questions to his father indicate his pain of being ridiculed by his peers as and the isolation he faced. In response, his father shifts the conversation from anger to empowerment. The father urges Samson to response this mockery not with aggression but through love. The father’s advice gives a powerful emotional and social lesson, showing Samson as capable of growth through emotional resilience. Samson's father's regret for not teaching him about love shows a difference in understanding the emotional struggles of children with disabilities across generations.

Lastly, Samson's dialogue with Eskinder demonstrates his emotional maturity in handling complicated social relationships and betrayal:

እስክንድር:- ይቅርታ አድርግልኝ እና ባለቤትህ፤ይቅርታ አድርግልኝና ትዳርክን ለመመበጥበጥ ፈልጌ አልነበረም::  
 ባለቤትህ ከበረከት ጋር....  
 ሳምሶን:- አውቃለሁ፤ እስክድር አውቃለሁ::

እስክንድር:- ታውቃለህ?  
 ሳምሶን:- አውቃለሁ:: ቢሮ ውስጥ የማርቲን ፎቶ ስትመለከቱ አይቻለሁ:: አውቃለሁ::  
 እስክንድር:- እግዚአብሔር! ይቅር በለኝ እሽ?

Eskinder: I’m sorry. I never meant to come between your marriage. Your wife and Bereket...  
 Samson: I know, Eskinder. I know.  
 Eskinder: You know?  
 Samson: I know. I saw you looking at Marta’s picture in the office. I already figured it out.  
 Eskinder: Oh God! Forgive me, please.  
 (Yuliyana, 2018, 01:16:16–01:16:43).

Samson’s response, “I know,” seems calm and mature. This indicates his awareness of the situation without showing anger or distress over what happened in his marriage. This portrayal shows that his ability to manage the betrayal without anger demonstrates his emotional maturity. This tells us that he seems to take the lesson from his father’s advice about love as wisdom to win his rivals. This can show that PwDs have complex emotional lives and the capacity to handle difficult social interactions. The response of Samson not only reflects his emotional resilience but also challenges the assumption that PwDs are emotionally vulnerable or incapable of understanding interpersonal dynamics.

**Barriers and Discrimination**

Persons with disabilities frequently face a variety of discriminatory practices. Most of them stem from negative preconceptions, societal judgment, and the internalized stigma that arises from the ongoing marginalization (Breffka, 2023; Goche *et al.*, 2019). *Alabedikum* effectively depicts these obstacles through the experiences of the protagonist with multiple disabilities. Samson’s conversation with his close friend shows his emotional distress as well as the ongoing social stigma he faces:

ሳምሶን:- ቀንም ለሊትም እንደማታምነኝ ልትነግረኝ ነው የመጣኸው?  
 ዳደኛ:- ሳምሶን እንደዚያ ማለቱ አይደለም:: ግን እንዴት ሁሉም ሰው ተሳስቶ አንተ ብቻ ትክክል ትሆናለህ ሳምሶን?  
 ‘አኬ ትክክል ነኝ ካልክ ለምን እውነቱን አትቀበል?’  
 ሳምሶን:- እኔ ብነግርህ አይገባህም::  
 ዳደኛ:- ሳምሶን አንድ ነገር ልንገርህ፤ በዚህ ሰዓት ሁሉም ሰው ባንተ ተሳቆ ነው፤ ቤተሰብ ብትሄድ፤ መስሪያ ቤት ብትሄድ:: ‘አትሊስት’ ቀሪ ዘመንህን በሰላም ኑር!  
 ሳምሶን:- እኔ ስለሰው አላወራሁም:: ስለራሴ ነው ያወራሁት:: እኔ ቦታውን አልወደድኩትም:: አስወጣኝ::  
 ዳደኛ:- አስወጣሃለሁ:: ግን ነገ ምን ይሆን? ዛሬ አስወጣሁህ፤ ነገ ምን ይሆን?  
 ሳምሶን:- የነገን አላውቅም አልኩህ::

Samson: Did you come here just to tell me that you don’t trust me at all?  
 Friend: That’s not what I meant, Samson. But how can everyone else be wrong and only you be right? If you say you are right, why not face the truth?  
 Samson: Even if I told you, you wouldn’t understand.  
 Friend: Samson, let me tell you something, right now, everyone feels embarrassed because of you, whether at home or at work. At least try to live the rest of your life in peace!

Samson: I haven't been speaking about others. I've been speaking about myself. I don't want to be here. Just take me out of this place.

Friend: I will. But what about tomorrow? If I take you out today, what happens tomorrow?

Samson: I told you, I don't know what tomorrow holds.

(Yuliyani, 2018, 00:02:22–00:03:12)

The dialogue shows that Samson is suffering from emotional loneliness apart from his physical segregation. It portrays a common experience for PwDs in Ethiopia who often face social isolation, negative emotional experiences, and limited social support due to stigma and structural barriers (Breffka, 2023; Shegaye *et al.*, 2024). The psychological experience of disability, which is often experienced due to social misjudgment, is observed by Samson's irritation when his friend fails to understand his point of view. Samson's statement that his friend "wouldn't understand" indicates the isolating nature of disability for those who have not experienced its internal suffering.

Samson's assertion that his friend "wouldn't understand," indicates that isolating aspect of disability by people who have not experienced the private life of suffering and resiliency.

The comments of his friend reveal the social stigma that PwDs face publicly and privately. Samson's friend advice, "live the rest of your life in peace," implies the ignorance of ignores the internal feelings and emotions of Samson, rooted from the social expectation of passivity and resignation. Samson's desire to free from his situation indicates the social and emotional challenges of handling his environment that is less accessible and emotionally exhausting. The response of Samson about "tomorrow" reflects the uncertainty and hopelessness that many PwDs feel about their future due to systemic barriers that continue to limit their opportunities and participation in the society (Breffka *et al.*, 2023; Goche *et al.*, 2019).

The conversation between Marta and Abigiya is the second example of the social stigma and discrimination that Samson faces in his home, despite his inherent goodness and contributions:

ማርታ:- እንደ ዛሬ ደሞ ደስ ብሎኝ አያውቅም። አባትሽ ስለሚወጣ ነው? እውይ ደሞ ደህና አባት እንዳለው።

አቢጊያ:- የኔ አባት ከሁሉም አባት ይበልጣል።

ማርታ:- ...አንቸ አስተዋይ ልጅ እንደሆንሽ አውቃለሁ። ነገር ግን ከአባትሽ መልካም ነገሮችን ብቻ መውሰድ ያለብሽ።

አቢጊያ:- አባዬ ሁሉም ነገሩ ጥሩ ነው።

ማርታ:- አይባልም። ከስር ቤት የምንቀበልው ወንጀል ሰርቶ እንጅ፣ በመልካም ተግባሩ አይደለም።

አቢጊያ:- አባዬ ጥሩ ሰው ነው። ተሳስተው ነው ያሰሩት።

Martha: You've never been this happy before. Is it because your father is being released? As if you have a good father.

Abigiya: My father is the best father of all.

Martha: I know you're a smart child, but you should learn to take only the good things from your father.

Abigiya: Everything about my father is good.

Martha: That's not true. He's being released because of the crime he committed, not because of his good deeds.

Abigiya: My father is a good man. They made a mistake when they arrested him.

(Yuliyani, 2018, 00:10:12–00:10:46)

This conversation shows the painful conflict between family loyalty and social criticism. Martha's first statement illustrates the tension between society's perception of Samson's criminal past and his daughter's, Abigiya, love and respect for him. She believes that her father is a good man who never gets involved in illegal activities. Her message challenges the community's judgment that considers Samson a criminal. Marta tries to convince her daughter that they are welcoming Samson with his crimes rather than with his virtues. In this regard, her statement shows how disabled people like Samson face challenges in being heard and recognized. Such a depiction mirrors personal alienation within families when stigma over disability or criminal accusation is experienced.

Martha's statement, “ብቅርብ መጥቸ ያልጠየኩህ ስላልተመቻኝ ነው።” (“I didn't come to visit you recently is because it wasn't convenient for me.”), further shows the social and emotional isolation Samson experiences after his release (Yuliyan, 2018, 00:11:29–00:11:30). From Samson's perspective, her different approach likely worsens the emotional wounds he already carries, causing him to struggle with rejection, even from close companions. Despite Samson's capacity to face challenges that come from society, this conversation reveals that he suffers both from external judgment and emotional abandonment by his beloved. Thus, his experience reveals a reality of the discrimination that PwDs with criminal histories.

These scenes, when combined, show how stigma and disability interact with stories of criminality to create obstacles to social acceptance, dignity, and belonging. Samson's experiences show the emotional pain of PwDs living in an inaccessible, discriminatory, and unsupportive environment (Iyassu & McKinnon, 2021).

### Reinforcement and Challenge of Disability Stereotypes

In this section, the reinforcement and challenges of disability stereotypes in the film *Alabedkum* are analyzed. In addition, how the character portrayal in the film and the representation of PwDs influence perceptions and understanding of disability in Ethiopian culture are treated.

#### *Reinforcement of Disability Stereotypes*

The reinforcement of disability stereotypes in film frequently mirrors larger cultural assumptions that stigmatize and marginalize people with disabilities. People with disabilities face stigma constructed by culture and social structures, which are often reinforced by negative portrayals in films (Goodley, 2017; Oliver, 1996; Shakespeare, 2018). Such experiences may be seen in a variety of character depictions in *Alabedikum*, which support distorted perceptions of Samson's identity even though they occasionally acknowledge his abilities.

The dialogue between Samson and the company boss reinforces the stereotype that PwDs are primarily desired for their technological know-how and work performance and dedication:

አለቃ:- እንዴት ነው፣ አየኸው? ስራ ተንቀራፍቷል፣አይደል? ቶሎ ቶሎ ብላቹህ ጨርሱት እንጅ ጊዜ የለንም እኮ።  
ሳምሶን:- ቶሎ እንጨርሳለን። ‘አርክቴክቸራሉ’ አልቆ ‘ለእስትራክቸራል ኢንጅነር’ ሊሰጥ ነው።  
አለቃ:- ‘ብራቮ!’ አየህ እኔ ሳሚን ምፈልገው ለዚህ ነው።

Boss: "So, how is it looking? The work is dragging, isn't it? I told you to finish it as soon as possible, but we're running out of time.

Samson: We'll finish soon. The architecture is done, and it's ready to be handed over to the structural engineer.

Boss: Bravo! Hey, that's why I want Sami on the team.

(Yuliyana, 2018, 00:22:56–00:23:14)

The scene unintentionally reinforces the idea that PwDs are valued exclusively for their technical skills and productivity, even though the boss recognizes Samson's professional ability. Samson's value is limited to his labor, with little regard for his emotional hardships, social goals, or sense of self-worth. This utilitarian perspective is similar to larger market-based discourses in which people with disabilities are only seen as socially acceptable provided they can prove their "usefulness" or measurable productivity (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Goodley, 2014; Shakespeare, 2018). Consequently, Samson's identity is reduced to a one-dimensional position, leaving aside his humanity. Hence, the depiction supports the myth that PwDs must gain social respect by their output rather than their intrinsic worth.

There are problematic cultural and social attitudes toward disability. The following scenes reflect the influence of these attitudes towards Samson's relationship.



(Yuliyana, 2018, 00:51:27)



(Yuliyana, 2018, 00:51:37)

Samson arrives at his lover's home with a flower. However, he is rejected and pushed away by her family due to his disability. In this cultural prejudice, disability is seen as incapable, and PwDs are viewed as unworthy of love or relationships. As Barnes (1992) argues, this portrayal indicates the attitude of the broader society to marginalize PwDs, and view them as less valuable to perform social roles such as relationships and make family, this stereotype is also reflected in Ethiopian context (Bewunetu and Thoedros, 2021).

Bereket's undermining of Samson and Marta's marriage is another example of disability stereotypes are reinforced in *Alabedkum*. Bereket states: “አንች ሳምሶን ጋር ሰማንያ ምናምን ስለሌላቸው እኔና አንች ደግሞ እንጋባለን። ይህን የማደርገው ለምን እንደሆነ ታውቁኝ? ስለምወድሽ፤ ስለማከብርሽ ብቻ ነው።” (“Since you and Samson don't have a marriage contract or anything, you and I will get married instead. Do you know why I'm doing this? It's simply because I love and respect you.”) (Yuliyana, 2018, 00:55:27–00:55:38). Bereket's comment reveals that his marriage is invalid due to lack of a legal marriage license due to Samson's disability. It implies that PwDs are unable to maintain relationships that are meaningful, valid, or acceptable in society. This reinforces a cultural perception that disabled people are unfit for family life, and they are unwelcome by partners and socially excluded in intimate relationships (Bewunetu and Thoedros, 2021). Samson's relationship with Marta thus symbolically indicates denial, diminishing his personality and propagating negative social prejudices.

Bereket's insulting comparison of Marta's relationship with Samson to that of a "fool" reveals the stereotype of PwDs as inferior. His statement, “አዛ ጅላጅል ጋር እንደገባሽ እኔም ጋር?” (“Do you want to be with me, like you were with that fool?”) (Yuliyana, 2018, 00:20:22–00:20:24). In this instance, Bereket's insult depicts Samson's disability as a sign of social and intellectual inadequacy. This derogatory term reduces him to being labeled as a "fool". The line represents cultural bias, which symbolizes disability with a lack of competence, reason, and desirability, rather than just rivalry to seek partnership. This instance is an example of how existing language

deprives the dignity of PwDs and reinforces the misleading beliefs that they cannot be treated as equal partners, serving violence against their rights (Bourdieu, 1991).

Another instance of prejudices being reinforced is when Samson's colleagues Eskinder, ridiculously calls him: “ይህ ማጅራት መቸ-ሌባ!” (“This mugger-thief!”) (Yuliyān, 2018, 00:36:42–00:36:44). This insult perpetuates the prejudice that PwDs could be suspicious, unreliable, or morally corrupted, which takes advantage of Samson's background and associates his disability with criminal activity. The connections between wrongdoing and disability are extremely problematic because they represent larger cultural fears that portray disabled people as liabilities or dangers to social order (Atifurrohim, 2022). The way Samson’s coworkers quickly turn against him shows how unstable social acceptance is for people with disabilities, and this increases their isolation and loneliness.

Together, the above instances show how *Alabedikum* reinforces cultural misconceptions about people with disabilities. Through portraying Samson as an illegal partner, productive worker, "fool," and even a criminal, the *Alabedikum* mirrors larger societal myths that minimize the agency of PwDs' lives. These depictions show how films can promote the ‘normal’ narrative and influence public opinion in ways that strengthen stigma (Davis, 2013).

### *Challenging Disability Stereotypes*

In a crucial conversation between Samson and his ex-lover, she finally admits to the wrong doing that messed his life. She confesses that she falsely accused Samson of rape that led him unjust imprisonment. Her revelation is not only an admission of guilt but also a plea for reconciliation. She goes further to inform Samson that his current wife has an affair with another man. She also warns him that even his daughter may abandon him when she grows up. She then promises to make him happy for the rest of his life if they get together. The response of Samson reflects resilience and challenges the community’s judgment that shows his strength in the face of betrayal:

የሳምሶን የድሮ ፍቅረኛ፡- አንተ አብደሃል ማለት ነው!

ሳምሶን፡- ሁሉም እደዚያ ነው ማለው፡፡ እብዶች ባሉበት አንድ ጤነኛ ካለ እሱም አብድ ነው፡፡

Samson's ex-lover: Are you mad!

Samson: Everyone says so. If there's one sane person among the mad people, he's mad too.

(Yuliyān, 2018, 01:23:30–01:23:43)

This dialogue represents the main ideas of *Alabedikum*, which directly addresses the social judgment and stigma placed on Samson, the main character with many disabilities. His different ideas, including his sympathy and support for street people, including those labeled “mentally ill,” make him stand out as “odd” to the community. Samson rejects his ex-lover’s love proposal to be together. She becomes upset and tells him is a “mad”. However, Samson’s response, “If there's one sane person among mad people, he's mad too,” is striking his ex-lover since she does not expect this answer from him. The dialogue reflects the film’s title and central theme. Thus, society labels him “mad” not due to true instability. Rather, it is due to his disability, the existing ideas, and refusal to meet to social injustice and prejudice.

Samson’s support for marginalized street people, often labeled “mentally ill,” further alienates him from a judgmental community that values the existing social norms. The response of Samson tells us a critique that in a world distorted by ignorance and bias, in which the true

thinking can appear as madness. Thus, *Alabedkum* asserts identity, resilience, and dignity in the face of marginalization.

Additionally, Samson's interactions dispel the myth that people with mental illnesses lack empathy or are undeserving of relationships:

ሳምሶን:- እኔ ጓደኛህ ሳምሶን ነኝ።  
 ጀማል:- እኔ ሰው አልፈልግም። ሰውም እኔን አይፈልግኝም። እኔ በሽተኛ ሰው ነኝ።  
 ሳምሶን:- አንተ ጀማል ነህ። አንተኮ ሰው ነህ፤ ሰው ደግሞ ሃገር ነው። ሃገር መውደድ ማለት ሰዎችን መውደድ ነው።  
 ጀማል:- ሃሃሃ...ሳምሶን እስኪ እንደለመድከው ተነሳና እቅፍ አድርገኝ እስኪ።  
 ሳምሶን:- ደግሞ ሰውነትህ ይቀዘቅዛል።

Samson: It's me, your friend, Samson.  
 Jemal: I don't want anyone. No one wants me. I'm a sick person.  
 Samson: You're Jamal. You are a man, and a man is like a country. To love a country is to love its people.  
 Jemal: Ha ha ha... Samson, get up and hug me like you used to.  
 Samson: But your body is already cold.  
 (Yuliyana, 2018, 00:20:42–00:21:39)

Instead of degrading Jamal to his mental illness, Samson treats him as a complete human being in this instance. Jamal's lighthearted reaction challenges social prejudices by proving that people with mental illness are capable of emotional depth and making relationships.

Moreover, a statement from Samson's supervisor emphasizes the risks of making rash judgments about other people:

ለካ እኛ ሰዎች ስንባል፤ ሁሌ ሰዎችን በልቧልታና በመልክ አይተን እየፈረድን ነው። ብዙዎችን ጎድተነናል። እንደ ወንጀለኛ ሳየው የኖርኩት ይቅር ይበለኝ። ምናልባት አይኖቻችን ከፍተን ማየት ከቻልን፤ እሱ እንድንማርበት የተሰጠን አዲስ ፍጥረት ነው።

Just as human beings, we often judge others based on rumors and appearances. We have hurt many. Forgive me for seeing him as a criminal. Perhaps, if we could open our eyes and see, he is a new creation, a gift given to us to learn from.  
 (Yuliyana, 2018, 01:25:01–01:25:30)

The boss's perspective in his message recognizes how society frequently criticizes people without knowing them. Samson's disabilities and suspecting him as criminal make him an easy target for stereotypic assumptions. However, the boss's readiness to ask forgiveness and portraying him as a "new creation" encourages listeners to look back past judgments. The request for forgiveness and the affirmation of Samson's inherent value promote a greater understanding of PwDs in society, particularly those who are excluded or misunderstood.

Through these conversations, the film *Alabedkum* challenges social assumptions about mental health issues and disability by providing moral integrity, resilience, and the ability to form meaningful human relationship. According to the movie, genuine dignity comes from people's moral and compassionate interactions with the world around them rather than from fitting in with social norms. Based on CDT, this encourages the society to genuinely appreciate true worth of this type of individuals without considering their disabilities (Norden, 1994).

## Conclusion and Implications

### Conclusion

The Amharic film *Alabedkum* portrays Samson, a protagonist with multiple disabilities, as a strong, kind, and ethically compassionate character, making it a powerful contribution to the representation of disabilities in Ethiopian cinema. This analysis uses Critical Disability Theory to show how the movie carefully balances between reinforcing and challenging prejudices about people with disabilities. The story challenges the cultural assumptions by presenting Samson's autonomy, intellectual brilliance, and solidarity with oppressed people. However, the film perpetuates some stereotypical portrayals, such as the "supercrip," object of violence and ridicule. Thus, the title of the film, *Alabedkum*, captures Samson's resistance to social labels that link disability to irrationality and frames his viewpoint as a critique of structural injustices. *The* film enriches Ethiopian cinematic discourse and international discussions on inclusive representation by asking audiences to reevaluate their preconceptions about disability and social worth by portraying disability as a lens through which to analyze societal injustices.

### Implications

The findings of the study have important implications for disability studies, and societal perceptions of people with disabilities, as well as discourses in Ethiopian film. The movie underscores how local stories may remove societal biases and promote intersectional and sympathetic storytelling. By incorporating disability as a complex part of identity, it establishes a standard for Amharic films to transcend reductive depictions. It also inspires filmmakers to work with disability communities to create accurate representations. Advocating for nuanced and intersectional methods to disability research, *Alabedkum* offers a useful case study for disability studies that examines the intersections of different disabilities with class, marginalization, and criminalization in Ethiopian contexts. The film advocates for societal reforms in media creation, such as the inclusion of disabled performers and consultants, to advance storylines that respect the autonomy and dignity of people with disabilities. In Ethiopian and international cinema, *Alabedkum* is a catalyst for reassessing cultural views and promoting inclusive storytelling by challenging existing conventions and elevating underrepresented perspectives.

### Declarations

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### Ethical approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declared that the research was conducted with no theoretical, commercial, or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest among them.

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