



A Contextual Interpretation of Disability Inclusion in 2 Samuel 9 and the Bamasaaba of Eastern Uganda

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Abstract

Disability inclusion among African communities is shaped by African religious discourse on disability, which influences the perceptions of the society. This article provides a contextual reading of disability inclusion in 2 Samuel 9 and among Bamasaaba of Eastern Uganda. The authors argue that although inclusive communities are affirmed in both Old and New Testaments, some oppressive and discriminative interpretations of biblical texts still exist. It explores how interpretation of disability in 2 Samuel 9 and among Bamasaaba can transform religious perceptions on disability inclusion. Through interpretive hermeneutical approach and historical-critical methods, the article establishes that aspects of identity, social status and perception as interpreted in 2 Samuel 9 correspond to how Bamasaaba construct disability phenomenon in their socio-religious contexts. Contextual interpretation of disability inclusion is significant for the liberation, inclusion, and

empowerment of people with disability to actively participate in society. Using African disability hermeneutics, biblical texts can be interpreted to transform the negative attitudes, theological views and religious perceptions on disability. Arguably, transforming the religious perceptions is necessary to removing barriers to inclusive religious and social participation of persons with disability.

Key words: African Hermeneutics, Disability in Africa, Inclusive participation, Bamasaaba, African Religion

Introduction

African communities have ultimate causal explanations for existential phenomenon of disability. The perceptions of the society towards inclusive development are greatly shaped by the African religious discourse on disability. African religious values are traditionally believed to create shared values, individual well-being and unity. The limited participation of people with disabilities

in religious activities or society is rather an irony (Chibaya, et al., 2021; UDSA, 2020; Ojok and Musenze, 2019). Davis (2013) acknowledges that the complexity of understanding being, and post-identity requires biblical scholarship to appreciate disability research as an important aspect for understanding human relations and construction of human identities. Therefore, this article explores how the African interpretation of 2 Samuel 9 can shape religious perceptions on disability inclusion among Ugandan communities.

The concept of disability has attracted several debates among academicians, social scientists and disability movements. According to Okola (2021), the World Council of Churches notes that disability is used to mean people who have capacities in different ways. Disability, therefore, is socially constructed by the people without impairment within society. In this regard, disability is used in this article to mean a situation of having an impairment and socially limited by the environmental (social and religious) barriers. People with disability include those physically impaired, visually and intellectually impaired. In African communities, disability among households is not separable from cultural belief systems, which are the basis for how the community understands and responds to disability among children. Ojok and Musenze (2019) argue that persons with disabilities were accepted and included in ancient Africa, and disability was not always seen as a “handicap.”

In contrast, in today’s Africa, persons with disability are increasingly becoming objects of pity and abuse because of ignorance and harsh economic conditions. Evidence of denying the identity of persons with disability abounds in churches where pastors exercise miraculous healing (Boaz, 2015, quoted in Ned, 2022:492). Additionally, certain persons with disabilities, particularly people living with albinism, are being killed because of the false belief that burying their heads in the foundation of a building makes the house owner rich (Ojok and Musenze, 2019). Historically, the challenges to disability inclusion in Africa are “Indigenous, colonial and post-colonial stigmas, legacies of armed conflicts and vast rural areas with epidemiological risks” (Falola and Hamel, 2021: 1). Scholars assert that persons with disability experience diverse challenges due to the religious and cultural beliefs regarding disability (Mukushi et al., 2019; Nyangweso, 2021).

Research Methodology

We conducted this study in randomly selected communities in Sironko and Manafwa districts of Eastern Uganda. This selection was based on the Uganda Disability Status Report (2019), which indicated that Districts in Eastern Uganda present the highest prevalence rate of 21.1% and the prevalence being high among Bugisu region, 37.8% in Sironko and 34.9% in Manafwa. The rationale for studying the Bamasaaba community was based on the need to consider the frameworks based on indigenous experiences and cultural contexts, when studying disability inclusion in the Global South (Nalugya et al., 2023: 404). We used the mixed method approach within the explanative sequential design to extensively study the research questions. Through a household survey, findings on Bamasaaba religious beliefs and perceptions of disability were obtained and analysed using descriptive statistics. The qualitative phase included interpretative hermeneutics, in-depth interviews and review of literatures on the study subject.

The component of biblical interpretation was completed through an interpretative hermeneutical approach based on historical critical method which was used in the exegetical study. During the hermeneutical analysis of disability in 2 Samuel 9, the process of interpretation considered the literal, functional dynamic meanings of the text based on contextual background. The exegetical analysis included an analysis of the historical context of 2 Samuel 9, the syntax analysis of words/phrases and how they are used in the text, and textual analysis to discuss the emerging themes on visualisation of disability inclusion in 2 Samuel 9. Through an intercultural iterative approach,

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the exegetical findings on the interpretations of disability in 2 Samuel 9 are compared to the Bamasaaba religious interpretations of disability.

African Religious Discourse of Disability Phenomenon

We used data obtained from oral interviews with participants and literature reviews to discuss the African religious perspectives on disability. Efforts were made to express how the African religious beliefs and practices have been the basis for responding to disability challenges. Before engaging with the findings on religious perceptions and practices regarding disability among Bamasaaba, we explore the significant concepts and relationships regarding disability within African religious communities.

Religion and Disability in African Society

Religion, for centuries, has influenced how communities live with people having any disability. Etieyibo and Omiego (2016:2) state that religion

means a set of shared attitudes, beliefs, values, goals and practices that characterizes an institution, an organization or a group...Religion... may be defined as a belief in the existence of a deity or supernatural power, a being that created and controls the universe and who is worshipped on the basis of such belief

Religion, as defined above consists of belief in the existence of deity and divine powers. It is thus an institutionalised system of religious beliefs and attitudes, as well as practices, in worship of God or a deity (Ned, 2022). For this article, religious traditions include: Judeo-Christianity, which holds beliefs in the biblical God, who created mankind in His image; and the African Traditional Religion which holds beliefs in the existing deity and supernatural being that has authority over life and controls what happens to the community. Religion in African societies is perceived as a contributor to Ubuntu Philosophy that promotes African humanism. Religious beliefs, values and practice influence how communities perceive and respond to disability among households. In African communities, disability is inseparable from cultural belief systems.

Imhoff (2017) has attested to the vital role played by the religious and theological interpretations

of disability. From the perspective of social construction of disability meaning, religion and theology has been looked at as key factors that shape the cultural construction of disability. The religious communities construct their perception regarding disability and inclusion based on their religious backgrounds. This places religious context at the focal point for discussing disability.

The link between cultural practices and religious rituals is essential in understanding how religious communities perceive disability. In traditional African perspective, disability is influenced by the social treatment offered to persons with impairment (Falola and Hamel, 2021) and religious perceptions of disability (Bennett and Volpe, 2018). The perceptions and social norms can be biblically and theologically founded or culturally constructed. The biblical perspectives have historically shaped how society relates with persons with disability (Otieno, 2009). The biblical texts have served as liberative or oppressive passages considering people with disability (McLachlan, 2018; Otieno, 2009; Hedges-Goettl, 2002; Rose, 1997). Visibly, religious traditions have a bearing on how people with disability (PWDs) are perceived and treated (Mukushi, et al., 2019:103).

Bamasaaba Religious Beliefs of Disability

This section presents findings on the traditional religious beliefs regarding disability among Bamasaaba, who are the decedents Masaba living in slopes of Mt Elgon, in a culturally sensitive community, found in Eastern Uganda (Khamalwa, 2018). The traditional religious beliefs among Bamasaaba saturate their social and cultural life style, influencing their perceptions and practices when it comes to living with disability. This section addresses the question of religious perceptions of disability from interviews and how they shape the response of Bamasaaba to disability challenges and participation of people with disability in society.

The Bamasaaba's key religious beliefs regarding disabilities include it being the will of God (60%), blessings from gods (10%), curse of disobedience (7%), work of spiritual demons (7%), punishment for sin (7%), unclean before God (3%) and others (8%). From the findings, one can see that majority of the respondents attribute disability to God or the ancestral gods. The Bamasaaba, religiously

Table 2.1: Survey responses on religious beliefs regarding disability among Bamasaaba, n=312

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent %
Religious Beliefs by Bamasaaba Community	Blessing from gods	29	9.6
	Work of spiritual demons	20	6.6
	Unclean before God	9	3
	Curse of disobedience	21	7
	Punishment of sin	20	6.6
	The will of God	179	59.3
	Other, not on list	24	7.9

Source: Primary data November 2022.

attribute disability to the work of God and ancestral spirits. Ancestral spirits are responsible for interpretations of the circumstances that would have caused disability in the family.

In his words, a cultural leader asserted that whenever a person is born with disability, *Wele musambwa* (Lit., Ancestral spirit) would say that this child is born but is not a true human being” (Oral Interview with cultural leader, 16 Nov 2022). Because of this religious belief, most persons living with disability are alienated on grounds of not being fully human. The religious leader (2022) noted,

In most cases they push them behind, because they think that the disability come from curses, which may have resulted from their parents being disobedient and rebellious to their parents. When a woman is pregnant, they are cursed. So, they think that disability is as a result of being cursed (Interview, 14 November).

The most common religious notions are centred on disability being a curse from *Wele* (God). The communities have also popularly attributed disability to demonic spirits, which they argue that whenever a pregnant woman meets with ghosts or demonic spirits, the evil spirits make the child in the womb to get a disability. This has resulted to religious rejection of individuals with congenital disabilities compared to those with acquired disabilities.

In order to appease the *Basambwa*, (ancestral spirits) to take away the curse, ‘a goat was slaughtered, roasted with Matooke’ (Cultural Leader, 18 Jan 2023). There was also a traditional belief that there are

supernatural powers behind disabilities. The belief is that for a disability to occur, then *weles* (ancestral gods) are not happy. Traditionally, Bamasaaba hold that, when one is indebted to someone or grab their land and does not want to pay back, *Wele* will punish them through bringing disability to the household. In this narrative, disability is presented as an imagery to explain the consequences of injustice, dishonesty, lack of integrity and many other vices. This reveals the cultural conscience of how the Bamasaaba handled disability.

Bamasaaba Perceptions on the Causes of Disability

We asked participants about the perceived causes of disability among Bamasaaba. Our findings are presented in table 2 below. The main views of the people in the community include the curse from parents (18%), sickness of the mothers (13%), misfortunes during pregnancy (11%), premature birth (8%), practising divination (5%), displeasure from the gods (5%), alcoholism during pregnancy (3%) and others (37%), that included accidents, family inheritance, delayed delivery, demonic attacks and perception that it can happen without cause. During oral interviews, religious leaders indicated that any impairment was seen as an abnormality which was as a result of a curse, and the majority of the Bamasaaba assume that a person wishes to be physically impaired. One religious leader (2022) revealed that ‘Persons with disability were perceived to be the reason for their disability. But this defers with the level of knowledge one has about living with disability and those who are religiously informed’ (Interview, 14 November).

Table 2.2: Perceived causes of disability

People's view on disability cause	The Curse on parents	54	18.2
	Misfortunes during pregnancy	32	10.8
	Displeasure of the gods	16	5.4
	Sickness of the mother	37	12.5
	Premature birth	24	8.1
	Alcoholism during pregnancy	8	2.7
	Practicing divination	15	5.1
	Other, not on list	111	37.4
Total		297	100

Source: Primary data collected using Household Survey, November 2022.

One cultural leader (2023) noted, “Bamasaaba traditionally understand that disability can be related to sickness and other disabilities are congenital. There are disabilities that are acquired in one’s adulthood, accidents that happen to young people” (Interview, 18 January).

The perception that having a disabled child may imply that one has been influenced by evil powers that deform them is very problematic. This creates divisions regarding how persons with disability interact socially within religious communities. The idea that disability is a burden leaves persons with disabilities socially and religiously alienated from those without disability.

McMahon-Panther and Bornman (2023) discover that perceived causes create environmental factors that become persistent obstacles that hinder religious participation of persons with disabilities in the religious communities and life of the church. Ault et al., (2023) discover a positive correlation between perceptions regarding disability and participation of persons with disability in society. Arguably, transforming perceptions and interpretations of disability phenomenon is crucial for inclusive participation. This is the subject of the subsequent section.

2 Samuel 9 on Disability Inclusion

To address the above perceptions and promote participation, a distinctive African disability theology is necessary to construct positive reflections regarding disability within biblical texts and African religious communities. This section

presents the interpretation of 2 Samuel 9 from African religious perspective using the disability theology lens.

Reading the Bible in the Context of Disability in Africa

African perspectives, in this study, include the Bamasaaba religious perspectives that shape how they use the Bible to respond to the disability question. The role the Bible plays in the life of Africans depends on how the Bible is interpreted and appropriated. The Bible is popularly regarded as God’s divinely inspired and communicated to human beings and can hence be used for liberation and redemption.

Arguably, the Bible is a religious book containing significant sacred texts with a relevant message for

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African socio-cultural contexts. The Bible speaks into the cultural life of Africans. Most Africans view their cultures as a medium of traditional religious practices. Cultural practices that encourage stigma, discrimination, negative attitudes towards people with disability can be addressed through the teaching of the Bible. The Bamasaaba readers of the Bible have used it to address challenges in their social and religious life. This is because the sacredness of biblical texts can be used as tools for liberation in the socio-cultural contexts of people living with disability.

The Bible has also been recognised as a spiritual resource. For instance, when viewed as a spiritual resource, it is considered as a book for spiritual development and edification. The persons living with disability equally have a soul and spirit that need spiritual nurture. They also struggle with spiritual warfare, evil and demonic attacks. This makes the Bible very relevant in their spiritual lives, since it is perceived and trusted as a book with spiritual powers among Africans (Ukpong, 1995).

Interpretation of Disability Phenomenon in 2 Samuel 9 and Among the Bamasaaba

Interpretative Context of Bamasaaba

The socio-religious context of constructing disability and interpreting disability phenomenon among Bamasaaba is based on the social and religious realities of Bamasaaba. As an indigenous community, within their socio-cultural contexts, the Bamasaaba understand disability as a congenital burden, personal tragedy and spiritual curse. This understanding emerged from the social realities that the family or persons with disability experience. From our findings, when a child is born with a disability, the Bamasaaba consulted their ancestral spirits to understand why this burden is given to them. To those who revealed themselves as Christians or Muslims by religious affiliation recounted that they perceived disability as a burden given by God to reveal their love for Him and for the people of God. This construction can be regarded as religious ethos for disability inclusion, but perceiving disability as a spiritual curse from ancestral spirits constructs disabling theologies that limit inclusion.

Findings from the previous section show that living with disability is challenging because of how

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the community constructs the phenomenon of disability. The Bamasaaba use disability language and imagery to express their social and religious connotation of disability. They are largely inclined to the perception that disability is a curse brought by God or ancestral spirits. This influences their attitudes and behaviours regarding disability inclusion. Specially constructing disability as the will of God, and congenital burden correspond with the presentation of the disability of Mephibosheth in 2 Sam 9.

Exegetical Analysis of 2 Samuel 9 on Disability Inclusion

The context of the Book of 2 Samuel is religious, since it presents the history of God's dealings with national leadership of Israel. Mathew (2010) notes that 2 Samuel continues the story of Israel's monarchy, tracing the history of David's reign from its triumphs to its troubles. Brueggemann (1990) affirms that the text is historically reliable concerning the life of Israel during this period. The text is theologically self-conscious but not in an excessively pious manner.

Throughout the passage, we observe that the narrators record how people are talking to one another and how their talking matters a lot. Interpreting the Book of 2 Samuel would therefore require consideration of both the narrative criticism and hermeneutical assumptions. As Firth (2019) points out, narrative criticism is a key tool for interpreting Samuel. Reading the text evokes a fresh discernment of life as a place where the power of speaking and listening matters to God and to us. Power, personality and providence are all present in the text (Brueggemann, 1990). This has an implication on how we read disability from this text. Our study approached the text of 2 Samuel as a living text to give hope for new insights regarding interpretation.

Scholars have argued that the Books of Samuel have a blend of genres, and so consist of various literary forms. The literary style and genre of 2 Samuel is related to the genre and writing style of former prophets. The dominant literary style of the books of Samuel being a narrative discourse and prophetic discourse (Brueggemann, 1990). The narrative genre covers much of the content as the authors employ it to indicate the transition period in the leadership history of Israel (Davies, 2009), making 1&2 Samuel constitute one of the finest historical narratives in all biblical literature (Letellier, 2023). Davies (2009) argues that containing the different literary forms give the books of Samuel depth and richness in content, with theological, literary and historical significance.

This study focused on the analysis of David's reign. This is sometimes called succession narrative or court history of David, because it is composed from the succession narrative source (Craig, 2013:5). 2 Samuel particularly contains records of the Israel's monarchy under the reign of king David. The background to 2 Samuel also reveals how book continues the story of how God established His kingdom through the leadership of Israel's monarchy (Matthew et al., 2012:97). In this study, we analysed 2 Samuel 9 with focus to the larger story of God's faithfulness to fulfil his promise to His people, based on His love covenant with His people. Faithfulness is a central theme in the Book. Based on this context, 2 Samuel 9 was chosen to visualize disability inclusion, since the text contains a context that can be used to universalize the faithfulness and love of God. Considering the perspective of love covenant was regarded as all-inclusive in nature. 2 Samuel 9 is read from a disability perspective to reveal that no man should look down on any person with disability, because before the Lord, all human kind are not above God. Focus is on the characters who the narrator considers as complex and uses them to understand the interpretation of the disability phenomenon in 2 Samuel 9.

Mephibosheth's Identity (4:4; vv.3, 6, 13)

This textual theme is presented to underscore the identity of persons with disability. Mephibosheth who is representing persons with disability is first introduced in 2 Sam 4:4, and later introduced in 9:3, at the request of King David. The passage of 2 Samuel 9:3, 6 is interpreted regarding the identity

of persons with disability. With reference to social construction of disability, vv.3, 6 are analysed to reveal the textual construction of the identity of Mephibosheth, amidst disability and how the presentation of Mephibosheth reveals the notion of disability and identity crisis.

In verse 3, the phrase **תְּנוּחַיִל נֶבֶן** (translated as 'Son of Jonathan') is used to introduce the son of Jonathan, who qualifies to receive the kindness of the king, as declared in verse 1. The phrase is used in the domain of kinship, to mean a direct or indirect descendent, child or offspring of Jonathan. The identity of the son of Jonathan is not fully introduced here though. Ziba, the servant in the household of Saul decided to introduce this son by nature of physical appearance. It is recorded: **רְמַאֲיוֹ הַמַּאֲוִי, בְּיָמֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הָיָה בְּבֵית דָּוִד, הַלְמַהֲלֵא אֲבִיבִי בְּמִלְגָּר הַכֵּן תְּנוּחַיִל וְגַם דָּוִד, הַלְמַהֲלֵא אֲבִיבִי** (Ziba answered the king, yes there is still a son of Jonathan whose feet are crippled"). The phrase: **בְּמִלְגָּר הַכֵּן** holds the purpose of providing a description of the nature of the person who had remained in the house of Saul. From the narrative, it is not clear whether David knew about this son. Early in 2 Samuel 4:4, this son is introduced and the author provides us some hint regarding their identity. In 4:4, an account on the family background of this son is given. The term, **הֵכָן** can be translated as being stricken, to be struck down or lame as used in 2 Sam 4:4 (Chine, 2009:273). However, the narrative indicates that the son was crippled, and after falling down, become lame (v. 4c). Notably, when one is stricken in feet, such one can be considered lame.

The narrator indicates that he is Jonathan's son and that he is disabled, before mentioning his name. This reveals an identity crisis due to disability. When Ziba is introducing Mephibosheth to David, he does not use his name, rather his embodiment (9:3). Ziba is seen to have had the history of how persons with disability were treated in their communities. So, he chose to introduce Mephibosheth by his disability. The narrator redirects our attention to this reference in 9:13. The disability status denied him the privilege of being the claimant of the throne of his grandfather and identity of royalty. Craig (2013) argues that we learn that as a member of the Saul's bloodline he is a claimant to his grandfather's throne. The day that his father and grandfather died, Mephibosheth's nurse, recognising that the young heir's life could be at risk, rescued him. As they fled, the boy fell and

was permanently maimed. Infirmity follows him like a refrain through the David narrative (Cf. Sam 9:3, 9:13, and 19:26) argues Craig (2013: 63).

The Social Status of Persons with Disability (vv.3-4)

The phrases: **בְּבֵית מַחִיר** ('house of Machir', and **לֹדֵבָר** ('Lo-debar') in verse 4 guide our understanding of the social status of Mephibosheth. The house of Machir is very significant in this narrative. Particular interest is in who Machir is in the narrative of David and Saul. This phrase is important in discussing the household for people with disability. Although Mephibosheth was impaired, the text indicates he belonged to a household of Machir in Lo-debar. Craig (2013) recounts that according 2 Sam. 17:27, the exact location of Lo-debar is unknown, but it seems to have been in Northern Transjordan.

Two aspects explain the social status of Mephibosheth. First is the location and household where he lived, Lo-debar (9:3). He was found somewhere, with people that knew him. This implies that people with disability need people that can introduce them, advocate and speak for them, where they cannot be present. Social and religious belonging within society is the basis for one's social status. Although one lived with disability, the social status of the family where they belong has a great impact on how the community perceives them. To encourage participation and inclusive development, persons with disability must be advocated for to have a place where they belong in society. In verse 6, the narrator begins with introduction of Mephibosheth arriving before David. Not to leave us guessing, the narrator mentions him as **נְתַנְהוּיָהוּ בֶן־יֹנָתָן** (Lit. 'Mephibosheth son of Jonathan'). What could be interesting is the assumption of the narrator that David and other readers already know that the son of Jonathan was Mephibosheth. Since he had been talked about in 2 Sam 4:4, it could be considered that the author is aware that readers of this narrative will resonate the narrative of chapter 4 and that of chapter 9. Although this could be the case, the nature of how Mephibosheth's account is engaged could be associated with nature of being disabled.

In the presence of David, Mephibosheth prostrates. This act of **וַיִּפְּלוּ לְפָנָיו** (translated as 'falling on faces') is historically symbolic for honouring the king.

Given that Mephibosheth was from the royal family line, it can be assumed that he was aware how one behaves before kings. It is also possible that Mephibosheth prostrates plead for life. This can be indicated by David's opening words to Mephibosheth in verse 7. David said: **אֵיךְ יִתֵּלֵךְ** (Translated 'Not you fear'). This is an indication that David is aware that Mephibosheth would actually be afraid to meet him. We can attribute this to the history of how David had dealt with Saul's household.

To calm the environment in Mephibosheth's mind and also to affirm his previous words of **אֵיךְ יִתֵּלֵךְ**, David goes to assure him that, **כִּי אֶמְצֵא חַסְדְּךָ** (translated as 'I will show to you kindness'). The verb, **הִשְׁעָה**, translated, "to perform something according to something, or do as someone has done," (Chines, 2009: 347), is often used when making reference to the practice of an individual, as they observe kindness (Cf. Gen. 19:19), exercise kingship (Cf 2 Kings. 21:7) or bestow life and kindness upon (Cf Job 10:12). David's kindness is for Jonathan's sake (**וַיַּחַדְתֵּם יְרֵכָה**).

Contextual Interpretation of Disability Phenomenon

The exegetical analysis indicated that the identity of Mephibosheth (representing persons with disability) is compromised by the authors because of the cultural representation of disability. Among Bamasaaba, the identity of persons with disability is also compromised by the cultural view of disability. In both cultural contexts there is an identity crisis presented, which is attributed to use of cultural nicknames in place of personal names for individuals living with disability. The identity crisis challenges the Ubuntu worldview that is characteristic of African community. Denial to identify persons with disability by their proper names leads social exclusion in schools and religious communities. Persons with disability should be part of the narratives and interaction in society and accorded dignity by identifying them by their proper names rather than nicknames. This can encourage them to find a sense of belonging in community.

The discourse on disability phenomenon in the text and among Bamasaaba also indicates that identity construction of persons with disability among Jewish and Bamasaaba communities is linked with the cultural ideology of how disability

is represented in the respective communities. This influences how individuals form the concept of self, which is necessary for positive identity formation (Murugami, 2009). The cultural systems and religious values have also been argued by other studies to be serious constraints to the identity of persons with disability (Mugeere et al., 2015; Murugami, 2009). Within an environment of religious and cultural diversity, disability is constructed differently. The environment that sidelines impairment, such as the one indicated in text (2 Sam 9) and among Bamasaaba can greatly impact the identity of persons with disability. From a social constructivist perspective, positive identity of persons with disability is constructed by challenging the social construction of normal bodies embracing the diversity created by impairments (Murugami, 2009).

In 9:8, Mephibosheth refers to himself as 'a dead dog' when he met with David. In the context of Mephibosheth meeting with David, the reference to himself as a dead dog would be polite for one pleading for his life. At the invitation of David, Mephibosheth sees himself unfit for the palace because of his disability. This negative self-image by persons with disability is equally common within African society. Notably, "people with disability hate themselves and are often tough in their interaction with other people in society" (Interview with religious leader, 14th Nov 2022). The phrase 'dead dog' would mean one who is seen as useless. This corresponds with how Bamasaaba locally identify persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities among Bamasaaba in Uganda do not receive education training, religious attention and discipleship, something that leaves them to live socially and religiously deprived lives.

Although Mephibosheth is presented as a cripple, and views himself as 'dead dog,' the text shows David being hesitant to reject Mephibosheth (vv.7,8-13). David's actions defy the Hebrew traditions that disrespected people with disability. David poses another enigma in his response to the servant Ziba. He demonstrates how a covenant keeping God would respond to His people that live with disability. David's perception disagrees with religious model of disability that indicate how disability is considered as sin and punishment (Lopez, 2016:7). The African religious communities

and community leaders need to embrace a positive image of persons with disability. This is fundamental to promotion of inclusive social and religious development.

As indicated, persons with disability may often develop negative perceptions of themselves, especially in interaction with the society. Importantly, the leaders should have a positive perception. Our findings among the Bamasaaba indicate that inclusive policies exist but the attitudes of religious leaders towards inclusion are largely negative. Religious leaders adopt a discourse that focuses on healing for people with disabilities. This challenges the self-image of people with disability. By using disability-related imagery, Belser (2019) argues that narratives create social challenges that make bodies with disability to serve as social inadequacies, hence making disability hinderance to service at the altar. Comparatively, where King David shows a positive perception, the religious and community leaders among Bamasaaba need to move an extra mile of transforming their perceptions regarding persons with disability. The difference in the findings is attributed to the socio-religious contexts that shape both Jewish and Bamasaaba communities.

Conclusion

In this paper, we analysed the narrative of 2 Sam 9 on Mephibosheth. We have argued that disability inclusion can be visualised in the Hebrew Bible. From the socio-religious context of Bamasaaba and the text of 2 Sam 9, impairments are used to introduce persons with disability; found to belong somewhere; perceived as outcast who do not deserve recognition. Arguably, the main issues of identity, social status and perception as interpreted in 2 Sam 9 correspond with how Bamasaaba construct disability phenomenon in their socio-religious contexts. Although the text of 2 Sam 9 does not explicitly address inclusion, the narrative themes that emerge from the disability interpretation can be used as a model for promoting inclusive participation of people with disability in society.

This article reveals the ways through which comparative interpretations of disability in the Bible can contribute to academic debates on inclusivity for persons with disability. An interpretation of 2 Samuel 9 on disability emerged with three themes

that are critical for consideration. They included: Identity of people with disability; their social status of, and the perception of leaders towards people with disability.

By investigating the historical narratives on religious perceptions of disability, our study has highlighted the negative religious beliefs and harmful cultural practices regarding disability, that originate from religious and cultural perceptions of disability. Adopting an African disability hermeneutics, biblical texts can be interpreted to transform the negative attitudes, theological views and religious perceptions on disability.

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