

## **New technologies and the entertainment industry: Dichotomy of Supernatural and Predestination in the Narratives of Nollywood Movies**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** The importance of genre creativity in the context of cinematic experience cannot be overstressed. This is because whoever controls content dominates audience's mind. Until recently, Africa appeared as landscapes and props for Western filmmakers in ways that are unsavoury and undignified. However, Nollywood's current popularity in world entertainment is helping Nigerian filmmakers to correct some negative stereotypical narratives.

**Objective:** The goal of this study was to appraise how Nollywood filmmakers combined the seeming polarity of supernatural and predestination themes in their narratives to create a unique genre that is complex and topical.

**Methodology:** The study adopted ideological analysis method to interrogate three Nollywood films with narrative themes of supernatural and predestination. It focused on content review of films that use charms to gain advantage from the production of the three main ethnic groups of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as proxies for the larger Nigeria communities.

**Results:** It was found that many Nollywood films laid emphasis on supernatural and predestination as modes for defining the African cultural heritage. It also found that some filmmakers have been successful in their use of supernatural and predestination as a source of conflict materials.

**Conclusion:** It therefore, concludes that the importance placed on the theme of predestination and supernatural by Nollywood filmmakers is justifiable and helpful in proffering solution to some negative parodies of African people.

**Unique Contribution:** This study has proven that by using supernatural and predestination themes in their narratives, Nollywood have reduce negative stereotype portrayal of Africans through creation of multi-dimensional characters with African cultural values that is universally popular.

**Recommendation:** The study recommends Nollywood filmmakers exploit African cultural heritage for conflict materials in their bid to create more successful content narratives. This would enable Africans correct some of the distortions in its stories.

**Keywords:** Culture, Framing, Ideological, Predestination and Supernatural.

## **Introduction**

The popular saying of zero to sixty which in actual fact describes the point of resting of a car engine and accelerating to sixty miles within a few seconds, could be equated with the expeditious progression of Nollywood film industry, especially since the advent of digital video production. Prior to this, Africa appeared as landscapes and props for Western filmmakers in ways that are unsavoury and undignified. They were seen as slaves, drug dealers, dullards, pimps, prostitutes, war lords and gangsters, all of which is a one dimensional simple characters. Since the introduction of digital production however, the growth has been remarkably exceptional, leaving in its wake, some new filmmaking lexicons that are characteristically Nigerian in shape and form. One of these new creations is the idea of predestination within the Nigerian filmographic dramaturgy.

Although, supernatural illusions and cinema have never been strange bed-fellows, however, the introduction of predestination and supernatural as a context to the narratives of Nollywood film genres has created a potpourri of dramatic elements that are not only diametrically opposed, but also combustible and incendiary to the plotlines of these movies. While their variation suggests incompatibility and contradictions that ought not be mixed together ordinarily, some clever directors have actually used this disparity to their advantage by turning it to the source of conflict that needs to be resolve by the climax of these movies.

This study is on the dichotomy of supernatural and predestination in Nollywood film narratives. The goal was to appraise how Nollywood filmmakers combined the seeming polarity of supernatural and predestination themes in their narratives to create a unique genre that is complex and topical. It also examined the effectiveness of this marriage in some of these films. See also (Iyorza 2008; 2014; 2017; Iyorza, & Abu, 2020;Iyorza, & Ekwok, 2015).

The study adopted ideological analysis methodology to interrogate three Nollywood films with narrative themes of supernatural and predestination. It focused on content review of films that use charms to gain advantage from the production of the three main ethnic groups of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as proxies for the larger Nigeria communities. In this direction, the study reviewed the incorporated values, beliefs, biases and assumptions of the Nigerian people as seen through Nollywood films. The paper also adopted the framing theory propounded by Gregory Bateson in 1972, which explains the mass communication industry's selective packaging and delivery of information to the public ([www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)).

In a bid to properly examine the use of supernatural and predestination in this work, it is germane to review why Nollywood films feel the need to focus its gaze on the conflicting narratives motif and what has been the resultant effect of this gape. Therefore, the study reviewed the genesis of issues of supernatural and predestination in the industry.

## **Folklore and Myths**

The mere mention of supernatural conjures an image of disruption, disbelief, shock and awe, while on the other side of the spectrum predestination evokes orderliness, method, peace and process. These two variants have been blended together to create one of the popular narrative mix of Nollywood genre that is not only interesting but also exciting and intriguing at the same time.

The genre of supernatural and predestination has been a popular theme in Nigerian drama for several decades as depicted in local theatrical stage plays of different levels. This stems from cultural folktales and myths carried over from one generation to another through oral traditions of various ethnic groups that constitute the Nigerian nation. Ishola (2008, p.11) sums up how a community or nation can develop, propagate, sustain, and perpetuate its culture for generations as thus:

Specific images of beauty, harmony, chivalry and justice, coming usually from inspiring episodes from their literature and group history, always guide people in determining what they want to be in life and how to attain it. Those images are culturally framed and experienced, so that there is always a “bank of images” to choose from. The bank of positive images in the mind of the African is the storehouse of acceptable standards.

Earlier on, the framing of culturally inspiring episodes of acceptable norms were done through memes, but were later adopted by some Nigerian dramatists using stage drama exposition. As the professional theatre practice developed, these myths and folktales became a source of materials for the new professional actors, a material that not only entertain the audience, but also binds them together in a collaborative opus of journey and discovery of their historical past brought to the present through these enactments.

At the initial stage of cinema in Nigeria, the medium was limited to merely exhibition. Of this, Opubor, Nwuneli and Oreh (1979, p.2) aver that “the first film to be exhibited in the country was at the Glover Memorial Hall, Lagos in 1903; and the feat was achieved by a European merchant, Stanley Jones.” Obviously, this screening was a documentary as most films of the period were. However, what made it unique at the time was a brief scene of Alake of Egba Land who was in the UK for King Edward VII’s coronation and this was shown to the delight of the Nigerian audience, a few of whom imagined the possibilities of the new cinema medium. For decades after that however, most of the few Nigerian cinema production continued to be documentaries.

Eventually, commercial cinema production began in Nigeria in the 1970s, a period in which the nation is seemingly blessed with an inexhaustible wealth of petro-dollar economy, an economy that is wholly based on rent-seeking landlords instead of any concrete industrial production. Ekwuazi (1987, p.15) states that “the first feature film recorded in a Nigerian language – Ibo – was produced by Afrocult Foundation Limited. The film, *Amadi*, was an instant success.” *Amadi* (1975) was directed by Ola Balogun, one of the early filmmakers of that period.

Ayakoroma (2014, p.32) also opines that the period of “1970-1985, would be referred to as the “glorious years” of the cinema industry in Nigeria. This era is taken as glorious, in the sense that, these were the years the cinema convention thrived in Nigeria, to some extent.” The ability of Nigerian filmmakers to easily afford the foreign exchange needed for cinema stocks and post production processing offshore was one of the critical reasons for their ability to follow cinema convention in the 1970s to mid 1980s, a fact that is wholly dependent on the petrol-dollar income of the crude commodity that rains in Nigeria during this period.

As the Nigerian economy was bubbling, a few theatre practitioners took tentative steps toward film production in collaboration with film directors like Ola Balogun. Of this incursion into films by Nigerian theatre practitioners, Odedina (2017, p.12) states that:

Yorùbá theatre troupes actually joined the feature film making ranks when late Ade Afolayan (a.k.a. Ade Love) and Dr. Ola Balogun blazed the trail with their film *Ajàní Ògún* (1976). Balogun had studied film in France and was eager to put into practice his art of filmmaking, but needed a vibrant theatre practitioner, which he found readily in Afolayan.

The progression from stage to film is also confirmed by Olayiwola (2011, p.193) who opines that the popular Yoruba travelling theatre practitioners were the nerve-centre of video

production in Nigeria due to their ready-made story straight from their plays. Some of the few films produced at this period are *Amadi* (1975), *Ajani Ogun* (1976), *Bisi Daughter of the River* (1977), and *Ija Ominira* (1979). Reiterating the popularity of the theatre troupes and their contribution to Nigerian drama Barber and Ogundijo (1994, p.12) states that:

The theatre groups, in Oyin Adejobi's words, 'are like preachers: we take a story and turn it into a lesson'. Members of the audience always insisted that though others might merely 'come to laugh', they came 'to pick a lesson' from the story that they could use in their lives.

Awash with cash from the petro-dollar financial windfall, all the newly minted films became box office success, a success that could no longer be ignored by the biggest name in Nigerian theatre profession at that time in the person of Hubert Ogunde. He has been in the forefront of the Nigerian professional theatre practitioners for about three decades by 1970s, but with the new medium of films, he suddenly sees some second and third-rate theatre actors becoming the talk of town. More than the popularity of these minor actors is the financial reward coming to the producers. As a business man who is unable to disregard this new trend, Ogunde commissioned his first film production *Aiye* (1979) in collaboration with Ola Balogun as the director.

While some stage dramatists with lesser name recognition started appearing in Nigerian films before Ogunde's production, it was his entrance into the field that solidified indigenous film production in Nigeria because of his status as the pre-eminent leader of these theatre practitioners at that time. Odedina (2019, p.290) corroborates this when he proffers that the "growth of home video films could be linked to the development and evolution of Yorùbá travelling theatre troupes that started with Hubert Ogunde in 1944." The fact that when Hollywood came calling to make *Mr. Johnson* (1990) in a Nigerian location and casted Hubert Ogunde as Pierce Brosnan's local accountant and side-kick in the film validates Ogunde's preeminent status in the Nigerian stage and film profession.

Although Ogunde's plays and movies are mostly based on Yoruba culture, this application of culture to drama is also similar to most of Nigerian nationalities and it is the same reason why the popularity of these movies cuts across ethnicity by popular acceptance. Hall's (1992) concept of national identity is a postmodern subject, which has shifting, multiple and fragmented ethnicities. The main theme running through the concept is the idea of creation and re-creation in relation to cultural identity whether of a person or state, making it a fluid concept that is never fully completed. In this way, the Nigerian culture continues its journey of formation and transformation through Nollywood.

Discussing some filmmakers and dramatists' effort in getting credible materials that reflects Nigerian culture, Adeleke (2003, p.54) states that "the seasoned filmmakers, such as Olá Balogún, Hubert Ogunde, Adéyemí Afoláyan (Ade Love), Oláiyá Adéjùmò made effort, to make research into the culture of the Yoruba before churning out their film productions." It is in this regards that the theme of supernatural and predestination is seemingly universal in Nollywood movies through the effort of the filmmakers in applying it to other cultures.

Due to the propagation of supernatural and predestination themes in the narratives of several of these films, Udomisor and Sonuga (2012, p.9) disclose that "though there have been several condemnations about recurrent themes such as witchcraft and the proliferation of black magic, which they find repulsive, it is also true that these themes have roots in popular cosmology." It is also worthy of note that many of the people who find the use of traditional supernatural powers repulsive are not necessarily against supernatural powers per se, but they would rather it comes through other means such as prayers from Islamic or Christian clerics. This suggests that for the most part, the belief in supernatural powers

manifested in Nollywood films is a shared cultural affinity of the Nigerian people with minor differences in the source of these powers.

By the same token, human predestination is another popular theme of various cultures of the Nigerian people. The Yorùbá culture for instance is very much in tandem with each person's predestination also known as *Ayanmo* in Yorùbá language which translates to fate. This fate is the pact one makes with his/her creator before even coming to being physically. It is however, also believed that the influence of supernatural actions on predestination can have serious ramifications that may be for good or bad.

Supernatural is therefore, used for positive and negative impact on destinies. Destinies that may have been influenced by other negative powers can be righted by deployment of other supernatural powers. Predestination implies fate, nature, karma and fortune, while supernatural connotes unnatural, collision, crash and bang. The combination of both belief results in consequences that may be for better or worse. This is the nexus that several Nollywood movies explore and exploit in the narrative and plotline of some of their movies.

### **Examination of Supernatural and Predestination**

The narrative of the supernatural and predestination is a popular theme in Nollywood films because as it has been observed by several scholars above, these issues have played prominent roles in Nigerian oral traditions, which became a rich source for professional theatre practitioners when they started plying their crafts by the middle of the last century. As it happens in Nigeria however, the coming of Nollywood into its own towards the end of the last millennia has resulted in the displacement of the professional travelling theatre troupes for the most part, just as the travelling troupes supplanted the olden days oral tradition and masquerade dancers. Therefore, the absorption of the theatre narratives by Nollywood could in fact be the only way to keep these narratives from their untimely demise.

Reflecting back to the Nigerian golden theatre period of 1970s as a high school student in Kwara state of Nigeria, there were usually two to three travelling theatre troupes that visited this researcher's secondary school at Igbaja on a yearly basis for stage drama recreation. One of the most popular then was the Oyin Adejobi group, led by Adejobi and his very popular Manager Alhaji Karimu Adepoju who later morphed to Baba Wande through television series. Some of their repertoires were *Ekuro Oloja*, *Orogun Adedigba* and *Obatala*.

The usual climatic show-down during these plays is done not through physical prowess or stature, but rather, the use of supernatural powers procured with medicinal charms and evocations. *Orogun Adedigba* was rumoured to be based on Adejobi's personal biography at that time. In the play, Adedigba is a second wife of a character who desperately wants a baby boy. The first wife had several female children, which leads to her husband marrying Adedigba who is predestined to open the gate of male children for both wives. True to the oracle's prediction, Adedigba delivers a male child that is foretold to bring other male children and prosperity to the family.

Unfortunately, the first wife sees this as an affront to her matriarchal position within the family hierarchy and feels threatened by a newcomer usurper. She tries to destroy the pregnancy with supernatural means to no avail and when the baby is eventually born there is no respite for him. The baby becomes a young man and is finally poisoned to death. With the help of the herbalist who foretold his arrival, he is revived in a showdown between him and the first wife using supernatural powers in the final confrontation.

At the end, the young man is alive but with a crutch as one of his legs is physically deformed. This was the only time the students had ever seen Adejobi in a standing position in all the time he visited the institution. The similarity between drama and reality may have been too much for the students, hence the rumoured story of autobiographical play.

The play is distinctively a tug of war between predestination as predicted by the oracle and supernatural power of the first wife, each of which stands firmly on opposing end of the pole. As it is with Adejobi, so was it with several theatre plays of the period. Nollywood is now bringing forth, some of these dramaturgies from their bags of tricks to the delight of the audience. In this vein, the three films reviewed for this study are *Elébòlò* (2008), *Seeds of Bondage* (2002) and *Rah Da Hakki* (2017). The following are the analyses of the three films.

The narrative theme of *Elébòlò* is about love relationship and the impact of supernatural. This Yorùbá video film is directed by Jide Kosoko. The lead characters are the protagonist named Femi and Joke as his nemesis. The driver who is also the messenger boy in the movie gives a young beautiful Joke a lift during an errand from his boss the Chief, which leads to a mid-day lunch at an expensive restaurant. Almost completing their meal, the driver realises Joke would not accede his sexual overture, making him to leave her with the bill through deception. The bill comes and with no cash, Joke has to work in the restaurant in disgrace to offset the bill.

The above beginning is an exposition into Joke's life, in which she seemingly enjoys an amorous lifestyle, until her older sister comes to the rescue by taking Joke into her matrimonial home so she could keep a good watch over her with the help of her husband Femi. Joke seems to be turning a new leaf but before too long, ensnares her brother-in-law Femi in her sexual devious ways. One of the neighbours, a friend of Joke's sister tries to report her suspicion about Joke, but the sister would have none of it insisting there is nothing wrong in the close relationship between her sister and husband and that both husband and wife are predestined to love each other till death.

Eventually, Joke tells Femi that her older sister is a witch and the cause of all Femi's woes which she in fact, brought about through her witchcraft powers. Since things have been going downhill for him lately, it is easy for Femi to believe his sister-in-law, especially when she is supported by a prophet who seems to know a lot about Femi's problems without having met him before his consultation. This provides a clear path for Femi and Joke to openly continue their illicit relationship, which culminates in Joke's pregnancy. Joke's sister finally believes her neighbour friend, but it is too late, leading to her being hospitalized due to shock. In the hospital, she meets the driver's boss the Chief who falls in love with her, which leads to their wedding and a new better life for her.

During a robbery attempt in Femi's house, the armed robbers killed his pregnant new wife Joke, after which her secret is revealed by the pastor who has been giving Femi false prophecies. Through flashback, we see Joke as a powerful witch who caught the pastor doubling as a ritualistic prophet to Ifa oracle and uses that to her advantage by blackmailing him, thus setting the stage for the conflict between predestination of love with abundance for Femi and his wife and supernatural power of Joke and her evil deeds to her sister.

The exposition of Joke as the supernatural power behind her older sister's bareness in Femi's house, his destitute nature since he meets Joke and the sudden hatred of his wife whom he was very much in love with before Joke comes into their home is nicely revealed through flashback and memory recounting of events by the pastor in his confession, as against showing the audience what was hidden by an Ifa priest. This is a creative way of revealing secrets to both the audience and other characters. Through the pastor's confession and not under any magical spell from the dead Joke, Femi comes to his senses and goes back to plead with his ex-wife, but she tells him she has moved on with her life.

The explicit message of this movie is a warning to desist from illegal and immoral activities like prostitution, failure of which can lead to a terrible end like it did for Joke, who lost her life and her unborn child. The implied content is about the moral decadence of the Nigerian society that make young promising members of the society crave quick wealth at all

cost and by any means. The term “Elébòlò”, which is the title of the movie, is an idiom popularised by Baba Suwe to describe amorous young ladies.

The impact of supernatural on the predestination of Joke, Femi and his ex-wife is evident in their ruptured relationships to each other and the subsequent untimely death of Joke, who is the one that used supernatural for the destruction of her sister’s marriage in order to marry her brother in law.

Although Joke’s sister suffered initially while Joke seemed to be riding high, the older sister’s predestination not only protected her through the ordeal because of her naiveté and innocence, but also leads her to a new and better husband thus, fulfilling her implied predestination as confessed by the prophet. The implication therefore, is that Joke’s supernatural power eventually caught up with her, and also pushed her sister to her predestination by marrying the love of her life who is not only able to take care of her emotional needs of love but also able to father their child and provides for the family.

The second film reviewed for this study is *Rah da Hakki* (2017). It is a Hausa language indigenous Nollywood film directed by Yaseer Hauwal. The protagonist of this movie is a police officer (Yazid) who is being haunted in his sleep by the ghost of Mallam Musa the innocent security guard, whose life is terminated through extra-judicial killing by the police.

The bone of contention here is economic issues which lead to any and all means necessary including the use of supernatural powers to acquire wealth in addition to criminality. With all his charms and firearms however, the kingpin of the armed robbery gang is caught by the police led by officer Yazid.

His doggedness to duty seems to be the only redeeming quality of police officer Yazid, who takes the bribe offer from the armed robber gang leader in exchange to spare his life. Since the order for extra judicial execution is from above on account of the robbers’ notoriety and killings of retired senior police officers, there is a demand for body count. To make the numbers having set the leader free in exchange for his foreign exchange cash, Yazid’s team wrongly arrests the leader’s innocent security guard and executes him in place of his boss.

Like Joke whose life is snuffed out through unpredictable turn of events that emanates from her manipulation of lives through her supernatural powers, Yazid also losses his soul. Yazid, an upright law enforcement officer gets entangle with the supernatural powers of the armed robbery kingpin and promises of wealth, thereby terminating the life of Malam Musa, an innocent guard of no consequence.

Unfortunately, the wealth acquired in the process is never adequate to quench Yazid’s thirst for peace anymore. He resigns his job, sends his wife packing and goes looking for the family of Malam Musa. Eventually he finds them in poverty and starts to throw money at them as a benefactor while they are still trying to find their family head. Although he thinks helping Musa’s family financially would assuage his guilt and gives him a measure of peace, the opposite is the same as Musa’s widow becomes suspicious of his motives and sends him away unless he tells them why he is being so nice to them. He is invited by the village head and in the process of interrogations, he confesses his guilt. The village head insists only Musa’s widow could forgive Yazid.

The next film, *Seeds of Bondage* (2002) is the third one reviewed in the course of the examination for this study and is directed by Chika Onu. Like the two before it, the movie’s central theme is based on the premise of using supernatural power to change what seems to be predetermined by fate with unpredictable consequences.

The audience comes into the lives of Chief Okonwa and Philomena his wife after ten years of marriage without a child. In Igbo culture where the story is based, such a situation is bound to bring a lot of stress on the couple as it does, which consequently leads to

desperation to find a solution. The couple goes from one medical check up to another and even several native doctors and herbalists in their efforts to have a child without success. Eventually, they meet Akolagu a native doctor and herbalist who tells them their problem of seeking a child is over. He promised to help them conceive but ask if there is any price they would not pay to have this child. The couple responds that no price is too much for them to pay and Akolagu assures them of a baby.

Within months Philo conceives and breaks the news to her husband on his return from work, he becomes so happy that he refuses to eat and rest as usual, but instead goes to his friend Alikali who is about to visit their village with a message for his own mother. The message from the Chief is “tell my mother, that the man I’ve been living with all these years, is a woman after all.”

The message is a testimony to the ridicule and pressure the couple must have endured from family members over the years, especially in a culture where it is a general expectation that the main reason for marriage is procreation. This must be one of the reasons why Okenwa and Philomena are desperate to have a child of their own by all means and at all cost. After the birth of the baby girl (Doris), the chief becomes seriously ill but is not responding to any medical treatment. Almost dead, the family doctor suggests an alternative medicine because he cannot diagnose his ailment, let alone treating it.

Philo brings a native medicine man to examine him but when he gets to the house, he tells her that the chief’s ailment stems from a covenant that the two of them has with a third party and only that party can rescind the agreement and make Okenwa well. With this information Philomena, her husband and niece Mary carrying baby Doris set out to Akolagu’s shrine. Without hesitation, Akolagu tells them that the chief’s death is one of the costs for having Doris and that Philo will also die within four market days. Alternatively, they can opt for Doris to die and both parents will live.

The couple disagree with both alternatives and pleads with Akolagu to consult his spirits and gods for a more favourable way out for them. After consulting the gods, Akolagu tells them the only other way is for them to bring him a boy or virgin girl for sacrifice that same day as the chief is supposed to die the next day. In addition, such sacrifice only buy them five years of living and is supposed to be renewed every five years. This is how Mary becomes the first sacrificial lamb, with others to follow every five years.

As can be seen in this narrative, in a bid to change what seems to be their predestination of no or late child of their own, which is a good thing to desire, the couple unwittingly invites the help of supernatural power that gives with one hand and takes back with two. As discussed earlier in this paper, there is a constant pull and push between predestination and supernatural power. This back and forth motion is seemingly unending, because as one is taking over domination, the other is already displacing it immediately until the final climatic explosion.

Knowing how much it cost Okenwa and Philomena to get Doris, it is understandable their reluctance in letting go of her so easily to redeem their own lives, especially since Mary and others sacrificed periodically are not their own flesh and blood. However, there comes a time when they start to ask within themselves how many innocent lives is Doris worth and they both reach this level of rational thinking separately, with different methods of resolution within their minds. These are the creative ways of how Nollywood use the theme of predestination and supernatural power in their dramaturgy to set the industry apart from others.

### **Conclusion**

The three analysed films for the dichotomy of predestination and supernatural on the lives of the characters have shown in varying degrees, the extent and influence of supernatural power on human predestination. The analyses of the films have clearly pointed



to the fact that using supernatural means to influence what is preordained is a combustible mixture that leads to unpredictable result.

The findings were that many Nollywood films laid emphasis on supernatural and predestination as modes for defining the African cultural heritage. It also found that some filmmakers have been successful in their use of supernatural and predestination as a source of conflict materials in the narrative sequence of Nollywood films.

The study established that only African filmmakers can remove negative stereotype portrayal of its people through multi-dimensional characters with African cultural values. It therefore, concludes that the importance placed on the theme of predestination and supernatural by Nollywood filmmakers is justifiable and helpful in proffering solution to some negative parodies of African people.

This study has proven that by using supernatural and predestination themes in their narratives, Nollywood have reduce negative stereotypical portrayal of Africans through creation of multi-dimensional characters with African cultural values that is universally popular. The study recommends Nollywood filmmakers exploit African cultural heritage for conflict materials in their bid to create more successful content materials. This would enable Africa correct some of the distortions in its stories. Like the Hollywood gangster and Bollywood melodramatic genres, the development of Nollywood's unique genres is an ideal ideology to pursue by framing African original stories rather than copy the west.

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There is no conflict of interest of any kind within this work and my job or any other relationships that I know of.

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### **Author (s) Contribution**

The sole author of this study is me Joe Odedina, with no contribution from anybody else.

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