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CLASS STRUGGLE, ELITE CAPTURE AND POSTCOLONIAL DISILLUSIONMENT: A MARXIST COMPARATIVE READING OF GEORGE ORWELL'S *ANIMAL FARM* AND THE NIGERIAN STATE, 1960–2026

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ABSTRACT

This opinion paper examines class struggle, elite capture and postcolonial disillusionment through a Marxist comparative reading of George Orwell's Animal Farm (Orwell, 1945) and the Nigerian state from independence in 1960 to 2026. It argues that the experiences of the animals in Orwell's fictional Manor Farm provide a framework for examining the contradictions of Nigeria's postcolonial political development, particularly the transformation of liberation aspirations into structures of privilege, domination and socioeconomic inequality. Drawing on Marxist concepts of class consciousness, exploitation, surplus appropriation, ideology, hegemony and the relationship between the economic base and political superstructure, and employing an interpretive, qualitative approach, the paper examines how successive Nigerian political elites have appropriated the language of nationalism, democracy, development and national unity while preserving unequal structures of economic and political power. The discussion considers the colonial foundations of the Nigerian state, the First Republic, military interventions, the oil-boom economy, structural adjustment, the return to democratic governance in 1999 and contemporary political-economic developments up to 2026. It also examines the symbolic significance of the pigs, particularly Napoleon and Squealer, in relation to political leadership, propaganda and institutional manipulation. The paper maintains that although Nigeria's historical experience cannot be reduced to Orwell's allegory, both contexts reveal the dangers of revolutionary betrayal, political opportunism, elite consolidation and the separation of ruling interests from popular aspirations. It concludes that meaningful postcolonial transformation requires democratic accountability, equitable resource distribution, productive economic restructuring, popular participation and a politically conscious citizenry able to challenge exploitation.

Keywords: Class Struggle, Elite Capture, Postcolonial Disillusionment, Marxism, Animal Farm, Nigerian State, Political Economy.

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Introduction

The relationship between political liberation, class formation and the reproduction of social inequality remains one of the most important questions in postcolonial African political and literary studies. The achievement of political independence by African countries was widely celebrated as the beginning of a new historical era in which indigenous populations would assume control of their political institutions, economic resources and cultural destinies. Independence was expected to dismantle colonial structures of exploitation, promote social justice, establish accountable political leadership and create opportunities for collective prosperity. However, the postcolonial experiences of several African countries have demonstrated that the transfer of political authority from colonial administrators to indigenous political elites does not automatically produce economic emancipation or social equality.

Nigeria provides an important example of this contradiction. Since attaining independence from Britain on 1 October 1960, the country has experienced different political systems, including parliamentary democracy, military authoritarianism and presidential democracy. Successive governments have presented themselves as agents of national transformation, economic development, democratic consolidation and social progress. Nevertheless, the persistence of poverty, unemployment, corruption, socioeconomic inequality, political patronage and uneven access to national resources has continued to generate public dissatisfaction and disillusionment.

The central argument of this paper is that the Nigerian postcolonial experience reveals a recurring contradiction between the aspirations of ordinary citizens and the interests of political and economic elites. Although political independence changed the nationality of those controlling the state, it did not completely dismantle the inherited structures of economic dependence, administrative centralisation and unequal resource distribution. In several historical periods, new political classes emerged whose access to public resources, government contracts, oil revenues, political appointments and economic opportunities became considerably greater than that of the wider population.

This contradiction finds an illuminating literary parallel in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945). The novella narrates the rebellion of farm animals against their human owner, Mr Jones, whose oppressive treatment represents an exploitative political and economic order. The animals overthrow the existing authority with the expectation of establishing a society based on equality, collective ownership and freedom. However, the pigs gradually monopolise leadership, knowledge, decision-making and material privileges. Napoleon eventually establishes an authoritarian system in which the original principles of the rebellion are manipulated to justify the domination of the other animals (Orwell, 1945).

Orwell's narrative therefore demonstrates how revolutionary ideals can be appropriated by a new ruling group that gradually reproduces the inequalities it originally promised to eliminate. The transformation of the pigs from revolutionary leaders into privileged rulers provides a significant framework for examining the contradictions of postcolonial political leadership. Orwell's central concern was not simply the overthrow of an oppressive authority but the danger that political revolutions could be betrayed by leaders who monopolise power and manipulate public consciousness (Orwell, 1945; Dickstein, 2007).

From a Marxist perspective, the similarities between the fictional farm and the Nigerian state can be examined through the concepts of class domination, exploitation, ideological manipulation and the concentration of economic resources. Marx and Engels (1848/1978) maintained that social history is fundamentally shaped by conflicts between classes whose

interests are determined by their positions within the economic organisation of society. Marx (1867/1976) further explained how capitalist production involves the appropriation of surplus value generated through labour.

In applying these ideas to Nigeria, this paper argues that the country's political history cannot be adequately understood without examining the relationship between state power, economic accumulation and class formation. The paper does not suggest that Nigeria is literally equivalent to Orwell's fictional farm or that all Nigerian leaders constitute a single homogeneous class. Rather, it employs *Animal Farm* as a comparative literary and political metaphor for understanding how liberation movements, political institutions and national development projects may become instruments of elite consolidation (Orwell, 1945).

The comparison is particularly significant in 2026, when Nigeria continues to confront difficult questions concerning the distribution of economic opportunities, the consequences of economic reforms, the accountability of political institutions and the relationship between government policies and citizens' welfare. The continuing gap between national economic potential and the living conditions of many Nigerians makes it necessary to reconsider the promises of independence and the extent to which successive governments have fulfilled them.

Existing scholarship has examined Animal Farm as a political fable about revolution, authoritarianism and the betrayal of socialist ideals. For example, Dickstein (2007) reads the novella in relation to its historical and political contexts. The present paper extends this discussion by placing the novella in a sustained comparison with Nigeria's postcolonial political economy from 1960 to 2026. Its contribution is the integration of Marxist class analysis with the Nigerian experiences of petroleum-based patronage, changing political regimes and continuing debates about the distribution of public resources. The paper does not claim that the fictional farm and Nigeria are identical; rather, it uses the allegory to identify comparable political patterns while recognising their historical differences (Orwell, 1945).

Methodologically, the paper is an opinion piece that adopts an interpretive, qualitative approach. It combines a close thematic reading of Orwell's Animal Farm with a critical historical analysis of secondary scholarship and of official and institutional reports on Nigeria's political economy, and it interprets both within a Marxist framework (Orwell, 1945).

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2.0 presents the conceptual and theoretical framework; Section 3.0 reads Animal Farm as an allegory of revolutionary betrayal; Section 4.0 traces the development of the Nigerian state from 1960 to 2026; Section 5.0 undertakes the comparative reading; Section 6.0 analyses class formation and elite capture; Section 7.0 examines postcolonial disillusionment; Section 8.0 considers the limitations of the comparison; Section 9.0 offers opinion and recommendations; and Section 10.0 concludes (Orwell, 1945).

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Marxism and the question of class struggle

Marxism provides the principal theoretical foundation for this paper. It is an approach to understanding society that places emphasis on the relationship between economic organisation, political power, social inequality and class relations. According to Marx and Engels (1848/1978), class conflict constitutes a central feature of societies characterised by unequal ownership and control of productive resources.

In capitalist societies, the bourgeoisie generally controls the means of production, while the proletariat depends on the sale of labour for survival. This relationship creates unequal economic power because those who control productive resources possess greater capacity to influence the conditions under which wealth is produced and distributed (Marx, 1867/1976).

Although Nigeria's postcolonial political economy cannot be explained exclusively through the classical European distinction between bourgeoisie and proletariat, Marxist analysis remains useful for understanding the relationship between political authority, economic accumulation and social privilege.

Nigeria has developed different forms of economically influential groups, including political officeholders, business interests, senior public officials, contractors and individuals whose economic activities depend significantly on access to state institutions. These groups do not necessarily share identical interests, but their relationships with public authority can provide opportunities for wealth accumulation and political influence.

A Marxist interpretation therefore asks fundamental questions: Who controls national resources? Who benefits from public expenditure? Who determines economic priorities? Who performs the labour that sustains national production? Who bears the consequences of economic policies? These questions are essential for understanding the persistence of class inequality in postcolonial Nigeria.

In *Animal Farm*, the pigs gradually assume control of the productive and administrative organisation of the farm. Although all animals contribute to agricultural production, the pigs acquire privileges that are unavailable to the others. Their position illustrates the emergence of a new ruling class within a society that initially rejected class domination (Orwell, 1945).

The relevance of this development to Nigeria lies in the distinction between formal political independence and substantive socioeconomic emancipation. A country may possess national sovereignty while large sections of its population remain excluded from meaningful economic opportunities.

Elite capture

Elite capture refers to the process through which influential individuals or groups appropriate public institutions, resources and development opportunities for their private or sectional interests rather than ensuring that such resources serve the wider population.

Elite capture may occur through political patronage, manipulation of public contracts, unequal access to government programmes, corruption, institutional interference and the concentration of economic opportunities among politically connected individuals.

In the Nigerian context, elite capture can be examined through the relationship between political office, public finance, business interests and the distribution of state resources. Lewis (2018) explains that Nigeria's petroleum economy has created a political environment in which government-controlled oil revenues influence elite bargaining, patronage and the organisation of political coalitions.

This perspective suggests that the struggle for political office in Nigeria is not simply a competition over ideological differences or public service. It may also involve competition over access to state-controlled economic resources.

In Orwell's *Animal Farm*, elite capture becomes visible when the pigs reserve the milk and apples for themselves. Squealer justifies the arrangement by claiming that the pigs require special nourishment because they perform intellectual work on behalf of the community. The explanation transforms a privilege into an apparently necessary public responsibility (Orwell, 1945).

The pigs' behaviour reveals how elites may use their positions, knowledge and control of information to rationalise unequal access to collective resources. A comparable Nigerian example is the use of government contracts as channels for political patronage and elite rent extraction. Miller's (2024) analysis of the 2020 oil shock reports that patronage networks and

contract-based transfers to politically connected actors were protected and expanded in 2021, despite the decline in oil revenues. This example illustrates how public authority and public finance may be used to preserve elite advantage, although it should not be taken to mean that every public contract is corrupt (Orwell, 1945).

Postcolonial disillusionment

Postcolonial disillusionment refers to the disappointment experienced when the promises of independence, national liberation and political self-determination fail to produce the expected social, political and economic transformation.

Fanon (1963) warned that the national bourgeoisie in newly independent African countries could reproduce colonial economic relationships instead of transforming them. According to Fanon, the emergence of indigenous political leadership does not necessarily guarantee the liberation of ordinary citizens if the new leadership merely occupies the administrative and economic positions previously controlled by colonial authorities.

This argument is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where the transfer of political power in 1960 was accompanied by the continuation of several inherited institutional and economic arrangements.

Ake (1981) similarly argued that the political economy of Africa must be understood through the historical relationship between colonialism, capitalism, dependency and the organisation of political authority. Ake (1985) further interrogated the character and future of the state in Africa, a concern that remains relevant to Nigeria's institutional weaknesses.

Postcolonial disillusionment in Nigeria is therefore reflected in the difference between the expectations associated with independence and the continuing experiences of poverty, institutional weakness, political exclusion and unequal access to national wealth.

In *Animal Farm*, the animals initially believe that their rebellion will establish freedom, equality and collective prosperity. However, the emergence of Napoleon's authoritarian leadership gradually destroys their expectations. The final transformation of the pigs into figures indistinguishable from the human oppressors symbolises the betrayal of revolutionary aspirations (Orwell, 1945).

Gramsci's concept of hegemony

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony provides another useful dimension to the analysis. Gramsci (1971) explained that ruling groups maintain dominance not only through coercion but also through the production of ideas, beliefs and social values that encourage subordinate groups to accept existing arrangements.

Political dominance is therefore strengthened when the ruling class controls important channels of communication, education and ideological production.

In *Animal Farm*, Squealer represents the manipulation of political language and public consciousness. Through propaganda, selective explanations and the rewriting of history, he persuades the animals to accept changes that contradict the original principles of Animalism (Orwell, 1945).

The Nigerian political environment can similarly be examined through the use of nationalist rhetoric, political slogans, promises of economic recovery, ethnic mobilisation and narratives of national security. These forms of communication can influence public perceptions of political authority and development policies.

However, it is important to distinguish legitimate public communication from propaganda. Governments have a responsibility to explain their policies, but such explanations

should be supported by verifiable evidence, institutional accountability and opportunities for citizens to question public decisions.

George Orwell's Animal Farm: A literary representation of revolutionary betrayal (Orwell, 1945)

George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, published in 1945, is one of the most influential political allegories in modern English literature. The novella presents the rebellion of animals against the oppressive ownership of Mr Jones and their subsequent attempt to establish a society based on equality and collective ownership (Orwell, 1945).

Although the work is historically associated with the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the consolidation of Stalinist authoritarianism, its political significance extends beyond the immediate historical events that inspired it (Dickstein, 2007). Orwell explores the possibility that revolutionary movements may reproduce the very structures of domination they originally opposed.

Rodden (2007) explains that *Animal Farm* represents Orwell's attempt to combine political criticism with literary creativity. Its central concern is the betrayal of revolutionary ideals through authoritarian leadership, ideological manipulation and the concentration of political authority (Orwell, 1945).

The animals initially believe that the elimination of human ownership will create a society in which the fruits of labour are shared equitably. Their optimism is reflected in the principles of Animalism, which promise freedom from human exploitation (Orwell, 1945).

However, the pigs gradually become the dominant group. They claim superior intelligence and assume responsibility for interpreting the principles of the revolution. Their intellectual position becomes the basis for political privilege (Orwell, 1945).

Napoleon eventually consolidates power by removing Snowball, suppressing opposition and establishing an increasingly authoritarian system. Squealer supports this process by manipulating language and persuading the animals that the leadership's decisions are consistent with the original revolutionary principles (Orwell, 1945).

The most important development in the novella is the gradual transformation of the Seven Commandments. Rules that initially establish equality are modified to accommodate the interests of the ruling pigs. The final alteration, which declares some animals more equal than others, reduces the promise of equality to a justification for hierarchy (Orwell, 1945).

The literary significance of this transformation lies in the exposure of the relationship between power and ideology. The pigs do not simply abandon the revolution; they reinterpret its principles to justify their privileges (Orwell, 1945).

This provides an important basis for examining the Nigerian postcolonial state, where political leaders have frequently invoked national unity, democracy, development and social transformation while the distribution of economic opportunities has remained unequal.

The historical development of the nigerian postcolonial state, 1960–2026

Independence and the expectations of national liberation, 1960–1966

Nigeria attained independence in 1960 amid considerable optimism concerning the country's political and economic future. The achievement of sovereignty was expected to create opportunities for indigenous leadership, national development and the redistribution of economic power.

However, independence did not immediately dismantle the political and economic structures inherited from colonial administration. The colonial state had established administrative institutions, regional political arrangements and economic relationships that were

primarily organised around imperial governance and the extraction of resources (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Falola and Heaton (2008) explain that the transition to independence was shaped by competing political, regional and ideological interests. The new Nigerian state therefore inherited significant challenges relating to national integration, political representation and economic distribution. The emergence of indigenous political elites created new opportunities for national leadership, but it also produced intense competition over the control of government institutions and public resources.

A Marxist reading identifies this period as the beginning of the struggle over the character of the postcolonial state. The central question was whether independence would produce a fundamentally different economic and political order or merely transfer control of existing institutions to a new group of indigenous elites.

The political instability that culminated in the military coups of 1966 and the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1970 demonstrated the fragility of the new political settlement. Nnoli's (1978) analysis of ethnicity and political conflict provides an important reminder that class relations in Nigeria intersect with regional and ethnic identities.

The lesson from this period is that political independence without effective institutions of inclusion and accountability may fail to establish the conditions necessary for lasting national transformation.

Military rule, centralisation and the consolidation of state power, 1966–1979

The military intervention of 1966 introduced a new phase in Nigeria's political development. Military governments justified their intervention through promises of national unity, political stability, discipline and the correction of civilian administrative failures. However, prolonged military rule strengthened centralised political authority and transformed the relationship between the state and society.

The Nigerian Civil War, which lasted from 1967 to 1970, further intensified the importance of national security, federal authority and political centralisation. Following the war, successive military administrations sought to consolidate national unity and restructure the federation. Osaghae (2018) explains that Nigeria's military epochs of 1966–1979 and 1983–1999 were characterised by authoritarian government, centralised authority and attempts by military rulers to establish political legitimacy.

From a Marxist perspective, military rule did not eliminate class inequality. Rather, it changed the institutional arrangements through which political and economic power were exercised. The military became an important institution within the political economy of the state. Access to public office, government contracts, administrative appointments and state-controlled resources became important channels of elite influence.

The experience can be compared with Napoleon's consolidation of authority in *Animal Farm*. Napoleon presents his leadership as necessary for stability and protection of the revolution, but the concentration of authority progressively reduces the ability of other animals to participate in collective decision-making (Orwell, 1945).

Similarly, the Nigerian military leadership frequently justified centralised political authority through the language of national security and unity. Although the historical circumstances were different, the comparison illustrates how the promise of stability may be used to legitimise the concentration of political power.

The oil boom and the emergence of a rentier political economy, 1970–1983

The oil boom transformed Nigeria's economic and political structure. Petroleum revenues became increasingly important to government finance, national development planning and the distribution of economic opportunities. Oil wealth created expectations of industrialisation, infrastructure development, educational expansion and improved living standards. However, the growing dependence on petroleum revenues also created opportunities for political patronage and the concentration of wealth.

Lewis (2018) argues that Nigeria's petroleum economy has been shaped by the relationship between oil revenues, political uncertainty, patronage and elite bargaining. The control of petroleum resources became an important factor in determining the character of political competition. Usman (2018) similarly argues that the problems associated with Nigeria's oil sector cannot be explained through natural-resource abundance alone. They must also be understood through the political constraints and distributional pressures influencing institutional reform.

The oil boom therefore created a contradiction between national wealth and popular welfare. While petroleum revenues increased the financial capacity of the state, the benefits of economic expansion were not distributed equally across society. This situation resembles the development of the pigs' privileged position in *Animal Farm*. The animals collectively produce the farm's wealth, but the pigs increasingly determine how the benefits are distributed (Orwell, 1945).

The comparison suggests that the central problem is not necessarily the availability of national resources but the political and institutional arrangements governing their ownership, management and distribution.

The Second Republic and the return to civilian politics, 1979–1983

The return to civilian government in 1979 generated renewed expectations of democratic participation and national development. The Second Republic introduced constitutional arrangements intended to strengthen democratic institutions and civilian authority. However, political competition remained closely connected to access to public resources, regional interests and patronage networks.

The political class operated within an environment in which government contracts, public expenditure and political appointments could become important instruments of influence. The collapse of the Second Republic in 1983 and the subsequent military intervention demonstrated the continuing weakness of democratic institutions (Joseph, 1987).

From the perspective of this paper, the period illustrates the limitations of political democracy when institutional accountability and economic transformation remain inadequate. The presence of elected representatives does not necessarily guarantee that government institutions will serve the interests of ordinary citizens. Democracy must involve more than periodic elections; it must also provide mechanisms for public participation, transparency and the equitable distribution of opportunities.

Structural adjustment, economic restructuring and social disillusionment, 1986–1999

The Structural Adjustment Programme introduced in 1986 marked an important turning point in Nigeria's political economy. The programme was associated with exchange-rate devaluation, trade and price liberalisation, financial-sector deregulation, and the restructuring and privatisation or commercialisation of public enterprises. These measures were intended to diversify the productive base, reduce dependence on oil and improve economic efficiency (Bangura, 1991; Omoruyi, 1987). However, their effects were uneven. Bangura (1991)

documents increased production costs, industrial closures and worker retrenchment in parts of the manufacturing sector.

Its stated objectives included improving economic efficiency, addressing macroeconomic imbalances and reducing dependence on a narrow, oil-dependent economic structure. However, the implementation of structural adjustment generated significant social and economic difficulties for many households and workers. The period was characterised by debates over inflation, employment, public-sector retrenchment, declining purchasing power and the social consequences of economic restructuring.

A Marxist interpretation examines how the costs and benefits of economic adjustment were distributed across different social groups. Economic reforms cannot be considered successful merely because they introduce new market arrangements or improve selected macroeconomic indicators. Their social consequences must also be assessed.

The experience of the period provides another parallel with *Animal Farm*. The pigs repeatedly justify their decisions by claiming that sacrifices are necessary to protect the revolution. The ordinary animals continue to labour under difficult conditions while the ruling group maintains its privileges. In Nigeria, economic restructuring similarly raised important questions about who bears the burden of adjustment and who benefits from the resulting economic opportunities (Orwell, 1945).

Osaghae (2022) observes that the struggle against military dictatorship during 1966–1999 involved significant resistance from civil society and other democratic forces. This resistance demonstrated that Nigerian society was not simply passive in the face of elite domination. The period therefore reveals both the persistence of elite power and the continuing capacity of organised citizens to demand political change.

Democratic restoration and the Fourth Republic, 1999–2015

The return to democratic government in 1999 created renewed expectations of political accountability, institutional reform and economic development. The Fourth Republic provided an opportunity to restore constitutional government, strengthen democratic institutions and improve the relationship between citizens and the state. However, the democratic transition did not automatically dismantle the networks of political patronage and economic influence established during earlier periods.

Nigeria continued to experience controversies concerning corruption, public procurement, electoral administration, oil revenue management and the effectiveness of public institutions. The democratic process also became closely associated with the competition for political office and the resources attached to government authority.

A Marxist analysis therefore asks whether democratic restoration fundamentally changed the relationship between the state and economically powerful groups or simply created new channels through which existing elites could preserve their influence. Joseph (1987), in his analysis of prebendal politics, provides a useful framework for understanding the distribution of public office and resources as political rewards within Nigerian political competition.

This perspective is relevant to the comparison with *Animal Farm*, where the overthrow of the old authority does not eliminate the desire for privilege. Instead, the new leadership appropriates the institutions and resources of the former ruling order. Nevertheless, the Fourth Republic also witnessed important democratic developments, including greater media activity, civil society engagement, judicial interventions and constitutional debates. These developments demonstrate that the Nigerian political experience cannot be reduced to uninterrupted elite domination (Orwell, 1945).

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Contemporary Nigeria, 2015–2026: Economic reform and the persistence of inequality

The period from 2015 to 2026 has been characterised by economic pressures, changing political alliances, insecurity, public-sector reforms and continuing debates over the relationship between national development and citizens' welfare. It should be noted that this period falls within the same Fourth Republic that began in 1999; the periodisation adopted here is therefore analytical rather than constitutional.

The administration inaugurated in 2015 presented anti-corruption, economic diversification and social intervention as major policy priorities. One concrete intervention was the launch of the National Social Investment Programme in 2016 (State House, 2023). The administration inaugurated in May 2023 subsequently introduced major reforms involving petrol-subsidy removal and changes to foreign-exchange management (World Bank, 2023).

The administration inaugurated in May 2023 introduced major reforms involving fuel subsidy removal and foreign-exchange policy changes. These reforms were presented as necessary measures for improving economic efficiency, strengthening government revenue and correcting longstanding distortions. However, the immediate effects of economic restructuring generated considerable pressure on households and businesses through changes in transport costs, food prices and the general cost of living.

The World Bank's October 2025 Nigeria Development Update observed that macroeconomic stabilisation had improved some economic indicators, but poverty and food inflation continued to place substantial pressure on households. Its April 2026 update further noted that macroeconomic progress had not yet translated into a full recovery in household incomes (World Bank, 2025, 2026).

The National Bureau of Statistics' 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index reported that approximately 133 million Nigerians (about 63 per cent of the population) were multidimensionally poor, illustrating the extent of deprivation across health, education, living standards and other dimensions (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022).

More recently, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2026) reported that monetary poverty increased from 40.1% in 2018–2019 to 56.2% in 2022–2023, leaving approximately 126 million people below the national poverty line. The report also identified weaknesses in implementation, programme coverage and sustainable financing as important obstacles to poverty reduction.

These figures provide an important context for examining the relationship between national economic resources and popular welfare. They do not, by themselves, prove elite capture, but they raise legitimate questions concerning the effectiveness of institutions responsible for converting national wealth into improved living conditions.

A Marxist reading of contemporary Nigeria therefore examines whether economic reforms are accompanied by sufficient mechanisms for protecting vulnerable populations, expanding productive employment and ensuring equitable access to national resources. The comparison with *Animal Farm* is especially relevant when government explanations of economic hardship are not accompanied by transparent evidence, effective accountability and measurable improvements in citizens' welfare (Orwell, 1945).

The critical question is not whether economic reforms are necessary in principle, but whether their implementation produces broad-based development or concentrates benefits among groups already possessing significant economic and political advantages.

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Comparative Marxist reading of Animal Farm and the Nigerian state (Orwell, 1945)

Revolutionary ideals and the betrayal of collective aspirations

One of the strongest similarities between *Animal Farm* and Nigeria's postcolonial experience concerns the gap between liberation ideals and political outcomes. The animals revolt against Mr Jones because they desire freedom, equality and collective prosperity. Similarly, Nigerian nationalists struggled against colonial rule with expectations of self-government, economic independence and social advancement (Orwell, 1945).

In both contexts, the initial political struggle was motivated by dissatisfaction with an existing structure of domination. However, the subsequent development of the new political order raises questions about the extent to which liberation transformed the distribution of power and economic resources. In *Animal Farm*, the pigs gradually appropriate the principles of the revolution. In Nigeria, the emergence of indigenous political elites did not automatically dismantle colonial patterns of economic dependence and administrative privilege (Orwell, 1945).

Fanon's (1963) warning about the postcolonial national bourgeoisie is particularly relevant here. He argued that national liberation could be undermined when indigenous elites became intermediaries between foreign economic interests and the domestic population rather than agents of fundamental transformation.

The Nigerian experience demonstrates the importance of distinguishing political independence from economic emancipation. The achievement of sovereignty is historically significant, but its developmental value depends on how political institutions are organised and how national resources are managed.

Napoleon and the concentration of political power (Orwell, 1945)

Napoleon represents the authoritarian dimension of revolutionary betrayal in Orwell's novella. His leadership is built around the concentration of decision-making authority, the suppression of opposition and the manipulation of collective institutions. His political success depends on transforming the revolution from a collective movement into a system controlled by a privileged leadership (Orwell, 1945).

The Nigerian comparison concerns the centralisation of political and economic power within successive administrations. Although Nigeria has experienced different constitutional arrangements and political systems, the concentration of authority within the executive branch has frequently generated debates about institutional independence, federalism and accountability.

The military era provides an especially significant example of centralised authority. Osaghae (2018) demonstrates that military governments often combined authoritarian control with claims of national correction and political stability. The Fourth Republic has restored constitutional democracy, but the effectiveness of democratic institutions continues to depend on the ability of legislatures, courts, oversight agencies, media organisations and civil society groups to exercise their responsibilities independently.

Napoleon's leadership illustrates the danger of treating political authority as a personal possession rather than a public trust. The lesson for Nigeria is that political leadership must remain subject to constitutional limitations, institutional scrutiny and citizens' participation (Orwell, 1945).

Squealer and the politics of ideological manipulation (Orwell, 1945)

Squealer is one of the most important characters in *Animal Farm* because he represents the ideological mechanisms through which political domination is justified. He uses persuasive language, selective information and distorted interpretations of events to defend the pigs'

privileges. His function is not simply to communicate government decisions but to shape the animals' understanding of political reality (Orwell, 1945).

Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony helps explain this process. Ruling groups maintain dominance partly by influencing the beliefs through which subordinate groups interpret their social conditions. In Nigeria, political communication frequently involves appeals to national unity, religious identity, ethnic solidarity, economic sacrifice and developmental promises.

Such appeals may serve legitimate public purposes. However, they become problematic when political language is used to prevent accountability, dismiss public criticism or conceal unequal resource distribution. For example, citizens may be encouraged to accept economic hardship as a necessary sacrifice for national development. While some reforms may involve short-term costs, democratic legitimacy requires that governments provide transparent explanations, credible evidence, appropriate social protection and measurable outcomes.

The comparison with Squealer therefore highlights the importance of media freedom, public information, independent research and citizens' ability to question official narratives (Orwell, 1945).

Boxer and the exploitation of the working population (Orwell, 1945)

Boxer represents the hardworking population whose labour sustains the farm but whose interests are neglected by the ruling pigs. His dedication, discipline and loyalty make him an important contributor to agricultural production. However, his commitment is not matched by equivalent social protection or material rewards: when he collapses from overwork, the pigs sell him to a knacker (Orwell, 1945).

From a Marxist perspective, Boxer symbolises the exploited working class whose labour produces wealth that is appropriated by a privileged minority. The Nigerian parallel can be examined through the experiences of workers, farmers, artisans, informal-sector operators, small business owners and other productive groups whose economic activities sustain society (Orwell, 1945).

Nigeria's working population contributes to national production through agriculture, manufacturing, construction, trade, transportation, education, healthcare and numerous informal economic activities. However, many workers face challenges involving inadequate wages, unstable employment, limited social protection, high living costs and restricted opportunities for economic advancement.

The importance of this comparison is that national development should not be measured exclusively through the growth of government revenues or the wealth accumulated by politically connected business interests. It should also be evaluated through the living conditions of those whose labour sustains the economy. A just political economy must recognise the dignity of work and ensure that economic growth produces meaningful improvements in workers' welfare.

Benjamin and the problem of political awareness (Orwell, 1945)

Benjamin, the donkey, represents a different dimension of political consciousness. He possesses considerable awareness of the contradictions developing on the farm but rarely translates that awareness into effective collective resistance. His attitude suggests the limitations of political knowledge when it is not accompanied by organised participation (Orwell, 1945).

The Nigerian comparison concerns public cynicism, political disengagement and the perception that electoral participation may not substantially change the distribution of political and economic power. Such attitudes may develop when citizens repeatedly encounter corruption

scandals, unfulfilled campaign promises, weak public services and limited institutional accountability.

However, political disengagement can unintentionally strengthen the position of privileged groups by reducing public scrutiny. A Marxist interpretation therefore emphasises the importance of class consciousness and collective organisation. Marx and Engels (1848/1978) argued that the political significance of class relations becomes more apparent when people recognise their shared material interests.

In Nigeria, trade unions, professional associations, civil society organisations, community groups, student organisations and independent media can contribute to public awareness and democratic accountability. The lesson from Benjamin is that understanding political injustice is not sufficient. It must be accompanied by constructive civic participation and institutional engagement (Orwell, 1945).

The Seven Commandments and the manipulation of public institutions (Orwell, 1945)

The gradual alteration of the Seven Commandments demonstrates how political institutions and foundational principles can be manipulated to serve the interests of those in power. The original rules are intended to protect equality and collective ownership. However, the pigs modify their interpretation to justify conduct that contradicts the revolution (Orwell, 1945).

This development provides a useful framework for examining the relationship between constitutional principles and political practice in Nigeria. Nigeria's Constitution (1999, as amended) establishes principles concerning sovereignty, democratic governance, fundamental rights, federalism and the responsibilities of public institutions.

However, the existence of constitutional provisions does not automatically guarantee their effective implementation. Institutional performance depends on the independence of oversight bodies, the integrity of public officials, the effectiveness of the judiciary and the willingness of political actors to respect constitutional limitations.

The Nigerian experience demonstrates that the difference between constitutional promises and institutional practice remains an important area of public concern. The comparison with *Animal Farm* therefore highlights the need to protect public institutions from political manipulation and ensure that constitutional principles remain meaningful in practice (Orwell, 1945).

The Windmill and the politics of development promises (Orwell, 1945)

The windmill in *Animal Farm* symbolises the promise of technological advancement, economic improvement and a better future. Although the windmill was originally Snowball's idea, Napoleon appropriates it after expelling Snowball and repeatedly uses the project to mobilise the animals and justify their continued labour. Although the windmill represents development, the benefits of the project remain closely connected to the interests of the ruling leadership (Orwell, 1945).

This provides a significant parallel with development planning in Nigeria. Since independence, successive administrations have introduced ambitious programmes involving industrialisation, agricultural transformation, infrastructure development, economic diversification and poverty reduction. These initiatives have often been presented as evidence of national progress. However, their effectiveness must be assessed through actual implementation, public accountability and the distribution of benefits.

The important lesson is that development projects should not be evaluated solely by their announcement, political visibility or financial allocation. They should be assessed according to

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their contribution to employment, productivity, social welfare, public infrastructure and improvements in the quality of life.

The final transformation: From liberation to reproduced domination

The final scene of *Animal Farm* provides the most powerful symbol of revolutionary betrayal. The pigs become indistinguishable from the humans they originally opposed. The significance of the ending is that the revolution has changed the identity of the rulers without fundamentally transforming the relationship between rulers and the ruled (Orwell, 1945).

This provides an important interpretive framework for examining postcolonial disillusionment in Nigeria. The central issue is not that indigenous leadership is inherently exploitative or that all political transitions are meaningless. Rather, the problem arises when political independence is not accompanied by institutional transformation, economic restructuring and democratic accountability.

The postcolonial state must therefore be judged by its ability to expand opportunities, protect citizens' rights, promote productive economic activity and ensure that public resources serve collective welfare.

Table 1. Comparative summary of selected characters and symbols in Animal Farm and the Nigerian state (Orwell, 1945)

Character or symbol	Function in Animal Farm	Nigerian comparative significance
Napoleon	Concentrates authority, suppresses opposition and turns collective leadership into personal rule.	Centralisation of political power and the need for constitutional checks and institutional accountability.
Squealer	Uses propaganda and selective explanations to defend the pigs' privileges.	Political communication that frames policy choices and can discourage scrutiny when not supported by transparent evidence.
Boxer	Provides labour but receives little protection; his loyalty is exploited.	Workers and informal-sector producers whose labour sustains the economy but who may face low wages, insecurity and weak social protection.
Benjamin	Recognises injustice but often remains passive.	Political awareness without sustained civic participation or collective organisation.
Seven Commandments	Rules are altered to legitimise the ruling group's conduct.	The gap that may arise between constitutional principles and their implementation in public institutions.
Windmill	A development project used to mobilise labour and sustain promises of future prosperity.	Public development projects that should be judged by implementation, public benefit and measurable outcomes.
The pigs' final transformation	The new rulers become indistinguishable from the former oppressors.	The risk that political succession changes officeholders without transforming unequal structures of power and resource distribution.

Note. Nigerian parallels are interpretive comparisons, not claims of historical equivalence. Source: Authors' synthesis based on Orwell (1945) and the discussion in this paper.

Class formation and the political economy of elite capture in Nigeria

The relationship between political office and wealth accumulation

One important feature of Nigeria's postcolonial political economy is the relationship between access to political office and opportunities for economic accumulation. Political authority can provide access to public contracts, regulatory decisions, government appointments, licences, concessions and other economic advantages. Where institutions are weak, such opportunities may be distributed through personal relationships and political patronage rather than transparent procedures.

Joseph's (1987) concept of prebendalism provides an important framework for understanding the tendency to treat public office as an avenue for distributing political and material benefits. Ekeh (1975) similarly argued that colonialism produced two publics in Africa, a civic public and a primordial public, with the result that the civic public came to be regarded as amoral and open to plunder in the service of the primordial one.

The Marxist significance of this arrangement lies in the relationship between state power and class formation. Economic privilege does not always emerge solely from ownership of productive enterprises. In some circumstances, access to political authority becomes an important route through which new economic interests are created and consolidated.

Lewis (2018) demonstrates the significance of oil revenues in shaping elite bargains and political spending in Nigeria. Miller (2024) further examines how political spending in Nigeria is connected to transactional political relationships and the financing of political alliances. These arguments suggest that the state is not simply a neutral institution standing above society. Its economic decisions can shape the interests, opportunities and influence of different social groups.

Oil wealth and the contradictions of national development

Nigeria's dependence on petroleum revenues has influenced the structure of its political economy since the 1970s. Oil wealth provides the state with significant financial resources, but it also creates incentives for competition over government-controlled revenues. The relationship between oil and political power has implications for fiscal accountability, economic diversification and the development of productive sectors.

Usman (2018) argues that the constraints affecting oil-sector reform in Nigeria are deeply connected to political and institutional pressures. The central problem is therefore not simply the existence of petroleum resources but the political arrangements through which they are controlled and distributed. From a Marxist perspective, the oil economy raises questions concerning ownership, surplus appropriation, labour and the social responsibilities associated with national resources.

If petroleum revenues are generated from collectively owned natural resources, their management should be accompanied by transparent public accounting and equitable investment in education, healthcare, infrastructure and productive economic activities.

Corruption and the reproduction of class inequality

Corruption is an important mechanism through which elite capture may be reproduced. It may involve the diversion of public resources, manipulation of procurement processes, abuse of official authority, conflicts of interest and the misuse of public institutions. However, corruption should not be treated merely as a collection of individual moral failures. A political-economic

analysis also examines the institutional conditions that make corrupt practices possible and profitable.

Where political appointments are distributed through patronage, public oversight is weak and economic opportunities depend on privileged access, corruption can become connected to broader patterns of class formation. In *Animal Farm*, the pigs' privileges become normalised through political justifications and institutional manipulation (Orwell, 1945).

Similarly, the normalisation of corruption in any political system weakens public confidence and undermines the principle that government institutions should serve the collective interest. The challenge for Nigeria is therefore to strengthen institutional accountability, enforce transparent procurement standards and ensure that public officials are subject to meaningful legal and democratic oversight.

Postcolonial disillusionment and the crisis of national development

The unfulfilled promises of independence

The achievement of independence generated expectations of improved living conditions, employment opportunities, national integration and social justice. However, the persistence of economic difficulties has created a gap between the expectations associated with independence and the experiences of many citizens. This gap constitutes an important dimension of postcolonial disillusionment.

The problem is particularly visible in the relationship between national wealth and the provision of essential public services. Nigeria possesses significant human and natural resources, yet poverty, infrastructure deficits, insecurity and uneven development remain important national concerns.

The country has recorded notable sectoral changes since independence, although their benefits have been uneven. For example, telecommunications liberalisation and the entry of private operators expanded access from a system with about 400,000 telephone lines in 2001 to approximately 187 million registered mobile connections by 2021. Educational indicators also improved in some periods: the net secondary-school attendance rate rose between 2003 and 2018, although progress was uneven and gender gaps remained (World Bank, 2022). These examples demonstrate measurable progress without suggesting that development has been uniform across sectors or social groups. However, the scale and distribution of these achievements remain subjects of legitimate public debate.

Poverty, unemployment and the material conditions of citizens

A Marxist analysis places the material conditions of citizens at the centre of political evaluation. The significance of poverty is not limited to insufficient income. It also involves restricted access to education, healthcare, housing, productive employment and other conditions necessary for human development. The NBS (2022) Multidimensional Poverty Index demonstrated the extent of deprivation across different dimensions of Nigerian life.

The 2026 UNCTAD report further indicates that the challenge of poverty reduction is connected to weak implementation, limited programme coverage, inadequate coordination and the need for stronger productive capacities. These findings reinforce the argument that national development requires more than economic growth or political announcements.

It requires institutional arrangements that enable citizens to participate meaningfully in productive economic activities and benefit from public investment.

Youth expectations and the crisis of social mobility

Young people constitute a substantial part of Nigeria's population. The National Population Commission's 2023 demographic projections place the population aged 15–24 at

approximately 44.6 million. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023) reported an unemployment rate of 8.6% among people aged 15–24 in the third quarter of 2023 and a youth not-in-employment, education or training (NEET) rate of 13.7%. These figures provide a measurable basis for examining young people's employment and social-mobility concerns.

Their expectations concerning education, employment, entrepreneurship and social mobility are closely connected to the legitimacy of the postcolonial state. Where educational qualifications do not translate into productive employment and economic opportunities remain concentrated among privileged groups, young people may become increasingly dissatisfied with existing institutions.

This situation creates a challenge for national development because a society that cannot provide meaningful opportunities for its younger population risks weakening its productive potential. In *Animal Farm*, the younger animals inherit a political system whose original ideals have been distorted. Their limited knowledge of the revolution makes them vulnerable to the established narratives of the ruling pigs (Orwell, 1945).

The Nigerian parallel concerns the responsibility of educational institutions, families, civil society and government to promote historical awareness, critical thinking, civic responsibility and economic participation among young citizens.

National unity, ethnicity and the class question

The Nigerian political experience cannot be understood through class analysis alone. Ethnicity, religion, regional identity, historical inequalities and federal arrangements have significantly influenced political competition and national development. However, these identities may also interact with class interests. Political elites may mobilise ethnic or religious identities to build political support, while economic competition may occur through networks that cross regional and communal boundaries.

A Marxist reading should therefore avoid treating ethnic identity as a substitute for class analysis. Nnoli (1978) demonstrates the importance of understanding the relationship between ethnicity and political development in Nigeria. The task is to examine how identity-based mobilisation may interact with economic interests, political patronage and the distribution of public resources. This approach recognises the complexity of Nigerian society without reducing its political problems to ethnic differences.

The limitations of the comparison

Although *Animal Farm* provides a useful literary framework for examining Nigeria's postcolonial political economy, the comparison has important limitations. First, Orwell's novella was primarily written as a political allegory concerning the Russian Revolution and the emergence of Stalinist authoritarianism. It was not intended as a direct historical representation of Nigeria or African postcolonial experience (Orwell, 1945).

Second, Nigeria is a complex and diverse society with a constitutional structure, multiple political parties, competing institutions, different economic sectors and active civil society organisations. These characteristics cannot be adequately represented through the simplified political structure of a fictional farm. Third, Nigeria's political history includes significant differences between civilian and military administrations, as well as important developments in constitutional government, public administration and economic policy.

Fourth, the Marxist framework must be applied with sensitivity to the relationship between class, ethnicity, religion, gender and regional inequality. A narrow economic interpretation would fail to capture the complexity of the Nigerian experience. Finally, the paper recognises that political leadership in Nigeria has not been uniformly characterised by

exploitation or institutional failure. There have been public officials, civil society organisations, professional groups and community institutions that have contributed positively to national development.

The comparison is therefore interpretive rather than literal. Its purpose is to identify recurring political and economic contradictions, not to claim that Nigerian history is identical to the fictional events of *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945).

Opinion and critical reflection: Reimagining the nigerian postcolonial state

The central opinion advanced in this paper is that Nigeria's developmental challenge is not simply a problem of inadequate natural resources, insufficient political leadership or the absence of development programmes. It is also a problem of how political power, economic opportunities and public resources are organised and distributed.

The history of the Nigerian state demonstrates that political independence, constitutional government and economic reforms are important but insufficient conditions for national transformation.

A state may possess a democratic constitution while its institutions remain vulnerable to patronage and political interference. It may generate substantial revenue while large sections of the population experience inadequate access to essential services. It may announce ambitious development programmes while implementation remains weak.

The comparison with *Animal Farm* suggests that the central danger of political transformation is the possibility that new leaders may reproduce the privileges and inequalities associated with the old order. This paper therefore advances the opinion that Nigeria requires a more substantive understanding of independence and democracy (Orwell, 1945).

Independence should mean not only freedom from foreign political control but also the development of domestic productive capacity, economic autonomy and social justice. Democracy should mean not only the right to vote but also the ability of citizens to influence public policy, question political authority and participate in decisions affecting their welfare.

Development should mean not only the construction of infrastructure or the announcement of economic reforms but also improvements in employment, healthcare, education, housing, food security and the general quality of life.

Rebuilding democratic accountability

Nigeria must strengthen the accountability of political institutions. The legislature, judiciary, electoral institutions, anti-corruption agencies and public audit systems should operate with sufficient independence to scrutinise government activities. Public procurement should be transparent, and citizens should have access to relevant information concerning public expenditure. These measures would reduce opportunities for elite capture and strengthen the relationship between political authority and public responsibility.

Promoting equitable distribution of national resources

National resources should be managed in ways that promote broad-based development. Petroleum revenues, taxation and public borrowing should support productive investment in education, healthcare, agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure and social protection. Resource allocation should be guided by public needs, measurable development priorities and transparent accountability.

Strengthening productive economic activities

A sustainable postcolonial economy should not depend excessively on petroleum revenues or political patronage. Nigeria needs a stronger productive economy supported by agriculture, manufacturing, technology, creative industries and small and medium-sized

enterprises. The expansion of productive activities would improve employment opportunities and reduce the economic vulnerability associated with dependence on a narrow range of revenue sources.

Promoting labour rights and social protection

Workers should enjoy fair compensation, safe working conditions and access to appropriate social protection. The economic contributions of farmers, informal-sector operators, artisans and other productive groups should receive greater recognition in public policy. A development model that depends on the labour of ordinary citizens must ensure that economic growth produces improvements in their welfare.

Strengthening civic education and political consciousness

The Nigerian educational system should promote historical awareness, critical thinking, democratic participation and responsible citizenship. Citizens need opportunities to understand the relationship between political authority, public resources and national development. Universities, colleges of education, schools, professional associations and civil society organisations should contribute to public discussions concerning governance and socioeconomic transformation.

Encouraging institutional rather than personality-based leadership

Nigeria's political future should depend less on the personalities of individual leaders and more on the strength of democratic institutions. Strong institutions establish procedures that apply regardless of who occupies political office. This principle directly addresses the central lesson of *Animal Farm*: a society cannot secure equality and justice simply by replacing one leader with another (Orwell, 1945). Meaningful transformation requires institutions capable of preventing the concentration and abuse of power.

Conclusion

This paper has examined class struggle, elite capture and postcolonial disillusionment through a Marxist comparative reading of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and the Nigerian state from 1960 to 2026 (Orwell, 1945). The discussion has demonstrated that Orwell's novella provides an important literary framework for understanding how political movements founded on liberation and equality can gradually become systems of privilege and domination. The experiences of the animals on Manor Farm reveal the dangers associated with the concentration of power, the manipulation of political ideology, the exploitation of labour and the betrayal of collective aspirations (Orwell, 1945). The Nigerian postcolonial experience presents related but historically distinct contradictions. Since independence, the country has experienced different political systems, economic reforms and development programmes. Nevertheless, the relationship between political authority, resource distribution and socioeconomic inequality has remained a significant concern.

The analysis has shown that the colonial legacy, military centralisation, petroleum dependence, patronage networks and institutional weaknesses have influenced the character of Nigeria's political economy. The emergence of indigenous political leadership did not automatically produce the economic and social emancipation expected at independence. Similarly, the return to democratic government in 1999 did not eliminate all the institutional and economic conditions associated with elite capture. The paper further argues that the persistence of poverty and unequal access to opportunities should be understood within the broader context of political economy rather than through individual moral explanations alone. From a Marxist perspective, meaningful transformation requires attention to the structures through which wealth is produced, accumulated and distributed.

The central lesson from *Animal Farm* is that political liberation becomes incomplete when the new ruling group reproduces the privileges of the old order. The Nigerian state must therefore move beyond the symbolic achievement of independence and strengthen the institutions necessary for substantive economic and social transformation (Orwell, 1945).

Ultimately, Nigeria's future depends on the development of a democratic and accountable political economy that places human welfare, productive capacity, social justice and equitable resource distribution at the centre of national development. The challenge is not merely to change those who occupy positions of authority but to transform the institutional and economic arrangements through which power is exercised.

As Orwell's allegory reminds readers, the promise of equality cannot be sustained by revolutionary slogans alone. It requires accountability, collective participation, institutional integrity and a genuine commitment to the welfare of the wider population.

Future research may complement this interpretive reading with empirical and comparative studies of specific sectors, institutions and policy episodes, so as to test the extent to which the patterns identified here hold across different periods and regions of Nigeria.

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