

## The Role of the Intellectuals in Making a Change in the Society: Reading in Saadallah Wannous's Theatre

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### Abstract

This article investigates the role of intellectuals in leading a non-violent revolution in society. It defines intellectuals and examines their role in bringing about real change. The primary definition is based on Antonio Gramsci's concept of the intellectual, which is a key element of his Marxist theory of hegemony. Additionally, the article explores various definitions of intellectuals and their role, particularly in the Arab world. Furthermore, the article discusses Saadallah Wannous, an Arab intellectual who was deeply influenced by Marxism and Gramsci's theory of hegemony. It focuses on his *Theatre of Politicization* as an example of hegemony and non-violent revolution. Wannous, a Marxist intellectual, strongly believed in the power of culture - especially theatre - as a means of driving social change. The article also examines how Wannous was influenced by Gramsci's idea of a non-violent revolution, often described as a revolution led by intellectuals. Finally, the article explores the current state of Arab intellectuals and evaluates the extent of their influence on societal change today. To delve deeper into the concept of intellectuals and their role in society, the article raises two key research questions: What is the role of intellectuals in bringing about change in Arab society? Have Arab intellectuals succeeded in effecting change in Arab countries? To answer these questions, the researcher will apply Marxism as the primary critical framework. In addition to Marxist theory, relevant journals and articles will be examined to analyze the role of Arab intellectuals in the Arab world.

**Keywords:** Intellectuals, non-violent revolution, violent revolution, hegemony, awareness, consciousness, culture

### ملخص

تهدف المقالة الى تسليط الضوء على دور المثقف في المجتمع العربي من أجل تحقيق الثورة السلمية التي من شأنها تحقيق تغيير في المجتمع. تقدم المقالة تعريف للمثقف مبني على نظرية أنطونيو غرامشي التي تعتبر جزءاً من مبادئه الماركسية والتي تعرف بـ "الهيمنة". كما تقدم المقالة تعريفات عدة لكلمة مثقف وتعرض دوره وخاصة في العالم العربي. تقدم الباحثة الكاتب المسرحي سعدالله ونوس كمثال على المثقف العربي الملتزم. ونوس كان بدوره متأثراً بالماركسية ونظرية "الهيمنة" لغرامشي. والمقصود هنا الهيمنة الثقافية للطبقة الحاكمة. وتسليط المقالة الضوء على مسرح سعدالله ونوس التيسيسي كمثال على إحدى أوجه الهيمنة الثقافية ووسيلة فعالة لنشر الوعي الثقافي والسياسي، ويعتبر مسرح ونوس واحد من أوجه الثورة السلمية التي تحدث عنها غرامشي وأرادها ونوس من أجل رفع الوعي السياسي واحداث تغيير في المجتمع. تختتم الباحثة المقالة بنظرة على واقع المثقف العربي ودوره الخجول حالياً في غياب أنظمة تحررية وغياب الخطة الثقافية المنهجية المنظمة.

## Introduction

This article explores the role of intellectuals in Arab societies and their potential to drive change. It builds on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, defining intellectuals within his Marxist framework. Gramsci, an Italian philosopher and Marxist thinker, introduced the idea of cultural hegemony, emphasizing the role of intellectuals in shaping societal consciousness.

In addition to discussing Gramsci's theory, the article examines various definitions of intellectuals, with a particular focus on Saadallah Wannous as a key Arab intellectual. Influenced by Marxism and Gramsci's ideas, Wannous developed the *Theatre of Politicization*, which he saw as a means of fostering awareness and inspiring non-violent revolution. This is especially relevant given the ongoing political and social struggles in many Arab countries, where intellectuals often face complex challenges, including political repression, censorship, and social unrest.

The article analyzes Wannous's play *The King's Elephant*, which features Zakarya, a character representing Arab intellectuals and their struggles within hegemonic structures. Through a Marxist reading of this play, the researcher examines how intellectuals challenge existing power dynamics and contribute to social transformation.

By focusing on the role of intellectuals in these societies, this article raises two key questions: What is the role of intellectuals in transforming society? Have Arab intellectuals succeeded in bringing about meaningful change despite political and social obstacles.

## Literature Review

### What is Marxism?

Marxism is a materialist philosophy that seeks to interpret the world based on the concrete natural environment and the society in which we live. According to Marxism, social progress is driven by the struggle between opposing forces. This class struggle is the primary force behind social transformation throughout history, originating from the exploitation of one class by another. Manuel Campos states, "Society progresses through the struggle between opposing forces. It is this struggle between opposing classes that results in social transformation. History progresses through this class struggle. Class struggle originates out of the exploitation of one class by another throughout history" (Campos, 2023, p. 4).

To better understand how ideology functions within society and how hegemony operates, one can turn to the ideas of Antonio Gramsci, a Marxist theorist, founder of the Italian Communist Party, politician, and philosopher. Gramsci defines hegemony as the dominance of a particular section of society by the ruling class, exercised through moral and intellectual leadership rather than force. Arjun Nomdevro Khobragade explains, "The term hegemony is primarily used to mean dominance with consent. A dominant class within any given society enjoys their dominance chiefly through the exercise of hegemony, which signifies an ideological dominance rather than a physical dominance" (Khobragade, 2023, p. 3). According to Gramsci, this cultural and intellectual dominance can serve as a means of resistance and potential salvation for the oppressed classes. In his vision of a non-violent revolution, intellectuals play a crucial role as leaders.

To clarify the relationship between intellectuals and hegemony, this article first defines the concept of the intellectual before analyzing their role in society. Marxism prioritizes three fundamental concepts: class struggle, the alienation of individuals under capitalism, and the relationship between a society's economic base and its cultural superstructure. The third concept, the connection between

economic base and cultural superstructure, is particularly relevant because it highlights how economic power shapes class divisions and influences cultural and social structures. According to Marxist theory, the dominant class exerts control over all aspects of society, reinforcing its power through institutions such as law, morality, and education. This framework is evident in several of Saadallah Wannous's plays within his Theatre of Politicization, where class dominance manifests in multiple ways.

The economic base serves as the field where intellectuals must play a vital role in raising awareness and challenging the existing power structures. Intellectuals, as described by Thomas Brock, act as the vanguard of the proletariat, leading non-violent revolution through education and consciousness-raising. Brock states, "This revolution would be led by enlightened leaders, known as the vanguard of the proletariat, who understand the class structure and would unite the working class by raising awareness and consciousness" (Brock, 2024, p. 5).

### **Who is the Intellectual?**

An intellectual is generally understood as someone who engages in critical thinking across various fields of life, such as science, philosophy, art, and literature. Intellectuals typically work to convey a particular belief or cause they support and strive to make it applicable to society.

Antonio Gramsci, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian Marxist philosopher and political thinker, provided a valuable study of intellectuals, considering them a part of cultural hegemony. His theory of the intellectual remains relevant in 21<sup>st</sup> century thought. Gramsci argues, "Since all persons are endowed with a mind, all are intellectuals in the most basic and banal sense" (Krause, 2022, p. 1). He further adds, "All men are intellectuals, because simply all humans have rational capacity and capability, but not all will become intellectuals [in fact, few do]" (Krause, 2022, p. 1). This means that while all people have the capacity to think and create, not everyone will use this capacity; only a few will employ their abilities to further their ideas and beliefs.

Gary Hall offers another perspective, claiming, "At least since Plato, intellectuals have portrayed themselves as vital to the good of humanity, and have done so in ways that depict them as the consciousness of society, representatives or spokespeople who act as the guardians of truth and justice for all" (Hall, 1996, p. 3).

In his book *Representation of the Intellectual* (1994), Edward Said characterizes the intellectual as "An individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, a philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma [rather than to reproduce them], to be someone who cannot easily be coopted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug" (Said, 1994, p. 11).

It is important to note that most Arab thinkers and intellectuals, including Edward Said and Saadallah Wannous, based their definitions of intellectuals on Gramsci's ideas. Moreover, these thinkers agree that the role of the intellectual goes beyond merely spreading their ideas; it extends to how the intellectual works to make these ideas more convincing and spreads awareness. Said explains, "Visibly represents a standpoint of some kind, and someone who makes articulate representations to his or her public despite all sorts of barriers... intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for the art of representing, whether that is talking, writing, teaching, appearing on television" (Said, 1994, p. 12-13).

In an article entitled *The Changing Roles of Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century*, Rajendra Pandey defines the intellectual as follows: "Intellectuals belong to one of the social groups which have risen to the

zenith of prominence in the wake of prodigious socio-economic changes that have taken place in the twentieth century” (Pandey, 1982, p. 2).

### **The Role of the Intellectual in Society**

Based on the definitions provided earlier in the article, the role of the intellectual is both important and influential, with the potential to bring about significant change in society. Many critics have presented various ideas regarding this role. This article focuses on Antonio Gramsci’s concept of the intellectual and explores how several Arab intellectuals, particularly Saadallah Wannous, were influenced by this idea. Saadallah Wannous, a Syrian Marxist playwright, was deeply influenced by Gramsci’s concept of the non-violent revolution. Additionally, Wannous himself was an intellectual with his own beliefs and concepts regarding societal reformation, particularly in the Arab world. To accurately examine Gramsci’s concept of the intellectual and to consider Saadallah Wannous as an example of intellectuals in the Arab world, this article provides a general overview of the intellectual’s role in society.

To begin with, Paul Krause argues that the role of the intellectual is to bring about real change by spreading awareness among the masses. He states, “To advance social and class consciousness... Specifically, to make aware the underclass of their oppression and position within the structural society they exist in... Gramsci’s revolution first takes place in the world of consciousness; from there it spills over to the material world” (Krause, 2022, p. 2).

A similar perspective on the intellectual’s role is presented by Edward Said, who asserts that the intellectuals not only articulates their ideas but also must persuade the public to advance the causes of freedom and justice (Said, 1994, p. 12-13).

In his article about intellectuals as prime agents of Antonio Gramsci’s philosophy of proletarian hegemony, Garry B. Tabugon discusses Gramsci’s concept of the non-violent revolution, describing it as a new strategy in the class struggle. Tabugon maintains, “The non-violent revolution is coined by Gramsci as Proletarian hegemony” (Tabugon, 2014, p. 1). He further adds, “To eradicate this mentality or ideology, there is a need to form organic intellectuals who commit their lives to educate the suffering masses and make them realize that they are the key to their liberation” (Tabugon, 2014, p. 1).

Gary Hall discusses the role of intellectuals in society, claiming, “Despite its prevalence, however, there are a number of problems with the idea that the role of the intellectual is unsustainable in the postmodern world of the late twentieth century” (Hall, 1996, p. 4). According to Hall, intellectuals are responsible for making real change in society because they help spread awareness among the general public. In fact, Antonio Gramsci’s ideology regarding hegemony was primarily concerned with how intellectuals can play a vital role in spreading awareness and enabling the proletariat to gain intellectual and moral leadership.

Valerino Ramos, Jr. states, “If Lenin stressed the importance of political leadership of the working class in the class struggle, Gramsci went a bit further by also emphasizing moral and intellectual leadership and the importance of non-economic relations between classes” (Ramos, Jr., 1982, p. 1). According to Gramsci, intellectuals must play a vital role in society to bring about change. His concept of the intellectual’s role is grounded in his idea of a peaceful, non-violent revolution. Paul Krause maintains, “The role of the intellectual, for Gramsci, is to create a new consciousness for a social strata that can bring meaning and understanding to one’s position in society and their role in life [thus, intellectuals are like a glue that keeps society together and in harmony]” (Krause, 2022, p.1). Pravina Pillay argues, “Gramsci envisaged a society where the working class becomes the dominant class. Together with the problem of gaining political and economic power, the proletariat must also face the problem of winning intellectual power” (Pillay, 2004, p. 119).

### **Saadallah Wannous and the Arab Intellectual**

Saadallah Wannous, originally influenced by Marxism, was shaped by Gramsci's concept of hegemony and shared Gramsci's belief in the importance of intellectuals within society. Furthermore, Wannous's aim and persistent pursuit of building a dedicated theatre were based on his belief that progressive thinking and a higher cultural level could play a vital role in raising awareness and effecting change within society. This change, brought about by intellectuals, could be social or political and was seen as the hope for the proletariat to become more conscious and to defend themselves against the oppression imposed by the ruling class. In this regard, Wannous shared Gramsci's idea of a peaceful revolution led by intellectuals through a certain ideology. This ideology, which could be made up of beliefs, concepts, and ideas, could be applied through culture and education.

Wannous's ideology is embodied in his Theatre of Politicization, which he founded in 1968. This theatre serves as the main pillar in effecting societal change. Many critics believe that Wannous, the revolutionary playwright, embedded his ideological beliefs, his system of social values, and his political messages within his texts and plays, all of which are analyzed through the lens of his intellectual project in a historical context. He is, indeed, an intellectual with a clear goal behind creating his Theatre of Politicization. Proof of this is that many, if not all, of his plays contained specific political messages, reflecting his ongoing struggle to bring about societal change. As an intellectual, Wannous believed that his Theatre of Politicization was the cultural means capable of raising the audience's social and political awareness, motivating them to act. Wannous's theatre aligns with the non-violent revolution that Gramsci discussed in his theory of hegemony.

Mohamad Kheer Youssef Alrefai, an associate professor at the University of Ermut-Jordan, notes, "Wannous sought this kind of theatre to create an audience that could interact with events, breaking free from their role as passive viewers, to critically assess what they see on stage and reflect more deeply" (Alrefai, 2019, p.1). This statement highlights that Saadallah Wannous represents the committed, educated, and cultured Arab intellectual. Through his theatre, he presented a progressive vision for the future of the Arab world. Throughout his theatrical career, he carried the struggles of his country as his central concern, using his theatre of Politicization to reflect his ideas. He did not view theatre as mere entertainment but as an essential part of culture, one that facilitates greater interaction and awareness among people. In alignment with Gramsci's concept of intellectuals, Saadallah Wannous's theatre represents a vital means within the hegemony and non-violent revolution. His plays are integral to his intellectual project, and he is considered one of the key intellectuals of the modern Arab world. His Theatre of Politicization emphasizes the idea of change and revolution.

Brahim El Guabli observes, "Saadallah Wannous is unlike any other playwright or intellectual. He is of a unique type, governed by hope. He belongs to a category of intellectuals who thrive on challenges and never surrender despite repeated defeats" (El Guabli, 2011, p.1). This perspective, along with many others, reinforces the idea that Saadallah Wannous was not just any playwright, but rather one of the organic intellectuals described in Gramsci's theory. He was not merely an educated man; his mission extended beyond writing plays. He aimed to use his theatre to raise awareness and drive real societal change. El Guabli further elaborates, "It is within this civilizational mission that Saadallah Wannous understood the power of theatre to liberate people from the fear of authority" (El Guabli, 2011, p.2). His influence lay in his vision and his Theatre of Politicization, which became his primary tool in the non-violent revolution.

Assad Alsaleh asserts, "The Theatre of Politicization refers to the works that Wannous published in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This political stage is devoted to provoking the spectator, exposing



the realities they do not see in the public sphere, which is dominated almost exclusively by coercive Arab regimes and their media, cultural, and mass-indoctrination systems” (Alsaleh, 2019, p.199).

Saadallah Wannous repeatedly stated that his Theatre of Politicization was a crucial weapon in the non-violent revolution. In a famous speech delivered at UNESCO in 1996, Wannous affirmed, “Theatre will remain the ideal forum in which man reflects on his existential and historical condition. What makes theatre unique is that it pulls the audience out of their isolation to collectively examine the human condition. Theatre awakens their sense of belonging and teaches them the richness of dialogue and its various levels” (Chalala, 1996, p.2). To emphasize that Saadallah Wannous’s Theatre of Politicization is part of the non-violent revolution, one can connect his ideas, especially his belief that the prosperity of theatre reflects the success of society as a whole. Any corruption or collapse in society directly impacts the cultural state and, consequently, the theatre. According to Wannous, theatre plays a crucial role in elevating the awareness of the masses and in cultivating the culture of society. He asserts, “Theatre is not only one of many manifestations of civil society, but one of the conditions necessary for the establishment and growth of this society” (Chalala, 1996, p.1). His focus on spreading awareness and improving the cultural state of the masses was particularly directed at the working class - the group suffering from oppression and exploitation by the ruling class.

Saadallah Wannous’s profound influence by Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is evident in his plays, the themes he explores, and the political messages he conveys to his audience. His works primarily target the common people, the proletariat, encouraging them to become more aware of their circumstances and to take steps toward meaningful societal change. Wannous believed that the construction of a new society begins with the destruction of the existing oppressive political regime and the establishment of a new ideology based on a heightened level of awareness among the exploited class. To accomplish this mission, intellectuals - particularly organic intellectuals - must work diligently to educate and cultivate the masses.

Saadallah Wannous acknowledged that the path would not be easy, particularly in the Arab world, where intellectuals have often failed in their duties due to fear of the prevailing political regimes. In many of his plays, Wannous explores themes of fear, cruelty, and suffering at the hands of the dominant class (the ruling political regimes), and he uses shocking imagery and symbols to stir the audience’s awareness and provoke action. In one of his masterpieces, *The Elephant of the King*, Wannous tells the story of oppression, fear, and cruelty endured by the people in Arab countries ruled by harsh political regimes. The play centers on a symbolic elephant, a tool of the king’s power, that terrorizes the streets daily, bringing chaos, fear, and death. Among the common people is Zakarya, the only educated man. He is portrayed as the bravest character and an example of the intellectual in the Arab world. Wannous uses this character to demonstrate that such an intellectual can make a significant impact if he fulfills his mission. Zakarya initially raises awareness among the people, unites them, and trains them to speak out against the king. However, when they reach the castle, Zakarya, in the presence of the king, hesitates and ultimately suggests that the elephant be given a mate instead of speaking out against its destructive actions. This marks a failed opportunity for the people to stand up for their rights, and the play ends with Wannous’s prediction that the road to salvation will be long, full of chaos, revolt, and bloodshed. Brahim El Guabli explains Zakarya’s behavior as typical of many Arab intellectuals, who fear authority. He states, “Zakarya trains his people to address the king respectfully. Yet, once in his presence, they lose their ability to speak. Zakarya does his part, but the people do not. Finally, Zakarya, to save his life, requests that the king find a female for the elephant” (El Guabli, 2011, p.2).

From a Marxist perspective, Saadallah Wannous believes that if the non-violent revolution led by intellectuals fails, a violent revolution will inevitably follow. This belief aligns with Marxist theory,

which posits that the continued exploitation of one class by another will lead to revolution. As Thomas Brock explains, “The inherent inequalities and exploitative economic relationships between these two classes will lead to a revolution where the working class rebels against the bourgeoisie, takes control of the means of production, and abolishes capitalism” (Brock, 2024, p.4). Moreover, Wannous adheres to the Marxist notion that intellectuals must lead the revolution. According to Brock, “This revolution would be led by enlightened leaders, the vanguard of the proletariat, who would raise awareness and class consciousness. After the revolution, private ownership of the means of production would be replaced by collective ownership, first under socialism and eventually under communism” (Brock, 2024, p.5). This revolution is central to Saadallah Wannous’s vision for his Theatre of Politicization. Through his theatre, he sought to raise awareness, inspire action, and motivate the masses to revolt against their social and political oppression.

Saadallah Wannous’s play *The Elephant of the King* reveals his belief in intellectuals as the key to saving the Arab nation from the chains of cruelty and oppression. He presents the vital role of intellectuals but also conveys a pessimistic view, recognizing that their potential impact is often hindered by various factors, especially in the Arab world. In her article *The Arab Intellectuals Crisis*, Awatef Abdel-Rahman maintains, “Arab intellectuals have all too often been hampered by doctrinal blinkers that have filtered out a true understanding of the development of Arab societies” (Abdel-Rahman, 2019, p. 1).

It is clear that intellectuals in Arab societies face a significant crisis, as their ideas are often met with oppression from authoritarian political regimes, which has led to a deterioration of their role. Many intellectuals, gripped by fear, have turned from agents of freedom and awareness to defenders of the ruling regimes, seeking personal safety or societal advancement instead of challenging oppressive structures.

The crisis of intellectuals and their role in the Arab world persists from Wannous’s time to the present. Wannous believed in the power of culture to bring about societal change, and he saw theatre as a key medium for spreading awareness and effecting change in the Arab world. However, he was also pessimistic, acknowledging the intellectuals’ challenging position. He knew they were not yet ready to lead a non-violent revolution because they shared the same fear as the masses, who were still controlled by oppressive regimes. Even the most courageous intellectuals, who strive to spread awareness and guide the working classes, may retreat or abandon their progressive projects when their lives are at risk, as shown by the character of Zakarya in *The Elephant of the King*.

The situation of Arab intellectuals remains critical today, as described by Sami Mahroum in his article, where he portrays them as endangered species. He writes, “An obsession with European modernity has prevented modern Arabs from developing their modern thought. There is therefore no point zero for contemporary Arab thought. There are no contemporary Arab schools of thought with whom to agree or disagree” (Mahroum, 2020, p. 2). Mahroum suggests that Arab intellectuals are caught between adopting Western culture and struggling to establish a clear, stable Arab identity. At the same time, they are unable to create a clear identity due to the oppressive environments in which they live. Arab intellectuals’ lack of a clear identity and their inability to play an effective role is partly because they are part of the common classes and are still too afraid to confront the ruling class. Throughout Arab history, there have been numerous intellectuals who attempted to raise awareness or initiate change, but their efforts often fell short due to the lack of a cohesive vision or the inability to overcome the challenges posed by authoritarian regimes. Some intellectuals sought to adopt Western ideologies, others embraced socialist or Marxist ideas, while some, like Wannous, had a specific vision for Arab society but were unable to succeed fully due to the unprepared environment and the lack of awareness and courage among the masses. The difficulty of intellectuals’ work in the Arab world is exacerbated by the fact that political regimes in many Arab countries remain dictatorial,

leaving little room for intellectuals or liberal ideas to flourish. As a result, the chances for any transformative movements remain limited.

Indeed, Arab intellectuals experienced a period of renaissance during the 1960s, especially after the Arab defeat in the 1967 war, Al Naksa. This period had a profound impact on Arab intellectuals, leading to the emergence of “committed literature” or *Adab Al Iltizam*. The aim of this genre was to explore the reasons behind the Arab defeat. Saadallah Wannous, with his *Theatre of Politicization*, was a pioneer in this movement. However, the movement did not fully succeed in its mission because the Arab world was engulfed in numerous complex political, social, and economic problems. While many intellectuals of *Adab Al Iltizam* succeeded in exposing the issues within Arab societies during and after the occupation, they were less successful in creating widespread societal change or raising collective awareness among the masses.

Many critics argue that the failure of the *Adab Al Iltizam* intellectuals, most of whom were socialist, lies in their inability to establish a foundation for genuine social change. Awatef Abdel-Rahman writes, “Marxist thought, despite its theoretically rich and enlightening legacy, failed to establish the foundations of genuine social change on the basis of the principles of social justice and class equality in the Arab region. It collided with authoritarian regimes that were for the most part subordinated to Western influences and propped up by allies among the business classes, tribal leaders, rural oligarchies, and corrupt bureaucracies” (Abdel-Rahman, 2019, p. 1). Despite the noble intentions and creative theories of the socialist intellectuals, their failure to implement these ideas in practice can be attributed to their adherence to Marxist and socialist doctrines, which were difficult to apply in Arab societies. Abdel-Rahman confirms, “The Arab Socialist thinkers failed to readjust and rectify their approaches, despite their noble aims and the huge sacrifices they made in the pursuit of their ideas. They were unable to look beyond the theoretical principles of Marxist or socialist thought” (Abdel-Rahman, 2019, p. 2).

The analysis of *The Elephant of the King* provides important insights into the role of intellectuals in Arab societies. The character of Zakarya reflects the struggles of Arab intellectuals as they navigate the challenges of resisting dominant power structures while confronting political repression and societal constraints. His internal conflict mirrors the broader tension between intellectual independence and state control.

Wannous presents theatre as a means of raising awareness and engaging audiences in political discourse. Through his *Theatre of Politicization*, he illustrates how intellectuals can influence public consciousness and inspire resistance without resorting to violence. However, the play also reveals the limitations intellectuals face, as their ability to bring about tangible change is often restricted by oppressive political systems and deeply entrenched ideologies.

These findings suggest that while intellectuals play a crucial role in shaping public discourse, their influence is frequently constrained by external forces. Wannous’s portrayal of their struggles highlights both the necessity of intellectual resistance and the challenges that come with it.

### Methodology

To examine the role of intellectuals in Arab societies, this study adopts a Marxist theoretical framework, focusing on Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. The research is qualitative and textual, analyzing how intellectuals function within power structures and contribute to social transformation.

The primary method used is Marxist literary analysis, applied to Saadallah Wannous’s play *The King’s Elephant*. This play is chosen because it explicitly explores the struggles of Arab intellectuals under



oppressive regimes. By analyzing its themes, characters, and dramatic structure, the study reveals how Wannous portrays the challenges intellectuals face and their potential for resistance.

This methodology is appropriate because Marxism emphasizes the relationship between ideology, culture, and power, which aligns with the study's focus on intellectuals as agents of change. Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony provides a critical lens through which the role of Arab intellectuals can be examined. According to Gramsci, hegemony refers to the cultural dominance of one class over another, shaping societal structures and maintaining power. This idea, rooted in Marx's theory of class struggle, highlights the intellectual's role in resisting dominant ideologies and fostering social change.

### **Findings and Conclusion**

In conclusion, the role of intellectuals in the Arab world is crucial and influential, with the potential to bring about significant change if they are given the opportunity to apply their theories and contribute to the development of public awareness on various levels. Today, it is evident that intellectuals face numerous challenges, as Arab countries grapple with issues such as dictatorial regimes, economic crises, religious struggles, and the deeply entrenched belief that change is difficult. These factors help explain why prominent Arab intellectuals like Saadallah Wannous were unable to fully achieve their missions. Nevertheless, it is important to maintain hope for change and a better future. If the non-violent revolution fails, it could ultimately lead to a violent revolution, resulting in destruction and chaos.

This article has explored the role of intellectuals in Arab societies through a Marxist lens, focusing on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony and its relevance to Saadallah Wannous's Theatre of Politicization. The analysis of *The Elephant of the King* demonstrates that intellectuals act as mediators between power and resistance, navigating complex sociopolitical landscapes.

The research highlights that while intellectuals have the potential to challenge hegemonic structures, their influence is often constrained by political repression and ideological limitations. However, Wannous's work suggests that intellectuals can still play a pivotal role in raising awareness and promoting non-violent resistance. Despite the obstacles, intellectuals have the capacity to inspire collective action and spark transformation.

Future research could examine how contemporary Arab intellectuals continue to navigate these challenges, and whether new forms of cultural expression have emerged as effective tools for resistance. By understanding the struggles and strategies of past intellectuals, we can better appreciate their ongoing influence in shaping societies.

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