

Ideologies vs Ecocide: A Case Study of the Play *Paper for Love*

Majd Qasas

Department of Theater Arts, Faculty of Arts and Design, The University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan

Abstract—This study examines the play *Paper for Love*, written by Jordanian playwright Laila Al-Atrash. Furthermore, it analyzes the views of different ideologies—namely capitalism, absurdism, religious extremism, and religious moderation—regarding the play’s poisonous emissions that threaten the world’s sustainability and examines how each of these ideologies views the underlying causes of Earth’s environmental degradation. The research shows how the absurdist view, by criticizing the world as it is now, ends child exploitation, war, hunger, and greed. The capitalist view, on the other hand, rejects the capitalist tenets it has been pursuing by destroying the environment while pretending to be religiously fervent. This is because poisonous emissions threaten to destroy the environment. This perception gives false hopes of a redirection of exploitative practices toward the individual and the environment; however, such hopes fade with the alleviation of the impending danger. In addition, the study shows that the characteristics of religious extremism place the danger caused by toxic gases on individuals’ straying from their faith and correlating their misfortunes with a lack of devotion and moral degradation. In contrast, people brought together by love from different religious backgrounds argue that the tragedies in the world are only a byproduct of intolerance and a failure to accept diversity. The author maintains that, although there are international efforts towards establishing legal frameworks intended to prevent genocide and environmental destruction, such efforts, although necessary, are still inadequate.

Index Terms—ecocide, genocide, ideology, religious extremism

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of climate change, global warming, and the widespread pollution of the marine, freshwater, atmospheric, and terrestrial ecosystems has become more crucial in the past decades. Such environmental changes threaten not just the existence of humans, but also the long-term health of the life of the planet. The accumulation of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, methane, ozone, and nitric acid, has occurred as a result of the combustion of fossil fuels and combustible materials, leading to an increase in global warming by around 1.2 degrees Celsius in the past one hundred years. Most of this increase in temperature happened between the years 1920 and 1950 (Mahiou, 2019). The other significant increase in temperature occurred in 1975, and the hottest year on record in recent history was 2005. Furthermore, sea levels have risen, and polar ice has decreased at alarming rates. All of these processes have been underway since the late 19th-century Industrial Revolution and have continued mostly unabated.

As for the use of poisonous gases, which form the main topic of this study, they have been used in warfare ever since the First World War. For example, tear gas was first used in France in the year 1914 (Paton James, Kansas University). However, it was in Germany that the development of chemical warfare took a big leap forward under Fritz Haber (1868–1934), who invented three types of gases meant for wartime use.

Despite the worldwide acknowledgment of the dangers posed by the storage and use of toxic gases as weapons of warfare—and in consonance with the 1925 Geneva Protocol, along with succeeding treaties and amendments against chemical arms—the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction continued unfazed. The Geneva Protocol categorically outlines the “prohibition of the use of asphyxiating, poisonous, or other gases, and of bacteriological methods of warfare” (Crook, 2014). However, it was not until a gathering prompted by George W. Bush in 1993 that nations were earnestly called to ratify the protocol. It culminated in 1997 when 191 countries signed the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) while 189 countries refused to sign at all (Lewis, 2014).

Though the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law establish significant legal frameworks, these are by no means foolproof. Instances of violation continue to take place across the globe, and stronger nations have, on occasion, used these laws as a pretext for attacks on weaker countries.

Apart from war, environmental hazards have emerged as a new menace to human existence. For example, greenhouse gas emissions are a major contributor to climate change. In the opinion of Nunes (2019),

the most dangerous form of carbon poisoning at atmospheric levels comes from greenhouse gases. Their increase is caused by human activities; combustion of fossil fuels like coal and oil sends the gases into the atmosphere, where they trap heat rather than letting its dispersion into outer space. The activity, which goes by the name of the greenhouse effect, results in increasing world temperatures, wildfires, and relocation or extinction of numerous species. (National Geographic.com)

Together with greenhouse gases, the issue of industrial pollution continues to worsen the environment. Many

factories release harmful emissions, including carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄), both of which contribute to rising temperatures and disrupt ecosystems (The Conversation.com, 2024).

In consideration of this environmental context, the researcher examines how Jordanian authors and playwrights have addressed these concerns in their literature. Quite notable is the fact that most of the environmentally themed plays in the Arab region, specifically in Jordan, are for children. As stipulated by Shaimaa Abu Zaid and Maryam Ghunaim in their book *Childhood and Education* (2023, p. 605), “Environmental behavior is a result of the knowledge and experiences a child gains, forming positive and negative attitudes.” Their study highlights how important early experience is in becoming environmentally aware.

Children's theater in Jordan began as an initiative by artist Margo Malatjian, who, in 1971, staged *Anbara and the Witch* at Wasefiyeh School Theater in Amman. This was followed by the establishment of the Children's Theater within the Department of Culture and Arts in the same year (Abu Shihab, 2004, p. 590). Since its beginning, Jordanian children have seen various environmental plays at children's theater festivals. A good example is the Iraqi musical theater play *Saadon and Na'san*, authored by Dr. Haider Al-Asadi and directed by Ahmed Al-Shamali, which advocates for environmental sustainability and sustainable practices (Al-Dustour newspaper, Iraq, 24/11/2024). Other than this play, Jordanian children have been exposed to several theatrical performances in educational settings and professional theaters that address environmental conservation. When it comes to professional adult theater, however, the environmental themes have hardly been present on the Jordanian stage. The first play to sound the alarm about the issue was *Paper for Love* by playwright Laila Al-Atrash, written and performed in 2011.

The play *Paper for Love* is about a group of men and women who are celebrating Valentine's Day in a particular place, only to find themselves suddenly faced with the emission of poisonous gases from an unspecified source. This sudden peril compels them to take shelter in a bunker, where they wear gas masks to save themselves until the danger passes. Within the shelter, humans must contemplate their destinies—will they live or die? The origin of the gases and the individual responsible are unknown; however, each one of the characters explains the occurrence based on their own distinct ideologies and personal history. Among them is a self-proclaimed absurdist, capitalist, and married man who is in the presence of both his wife and his pregnant mistress. There is also an Islamic extremist determined to kill his sister simply because she is in love with the absurdist. Also among the group are two lovers from different religious backgrounds seeking to overcome the sectarian divide to be together. Finally, there is also a pregnant woman and her husband who have been waiting for their first child after a long time of infertility.

While the danger wanes over time, some choose to exit the asylum, while others prefer to stay, seeing this option as a safer option among the chaos and uncertainty of the outside environment. The absurdist and the sister of the extremist, who adores him, are among those who opt not to leave. The expectant woman and her husband also choose to stay to shield their unborn child from the wreckage outside. The interfaith couple also stays. The religious extremist, the capitalist, his wife, and his mistress are the ones who depart.

Laila Al-Atrash, a prolific Jordanian author with several literary awards to her name, makes her playwrighting debut with *Paper for Love*. She endeavors to present the play to all humankind as her own contribution to the collective effort toward halting the non-stop devastation of the planet. Al-Atrash sends several messages—she is demanding a haven for children, a haven for the victims of religious extremism, and a haven for love beyond religious differences. She also makes a loud call to the world to stop the destruction of the earth and its people. She aims to inspire policymakers through her writings to implement more significant measures in protecting the world. The present study will illuminate how some characters perceive the cause of toxic gas emissions and how they lead to environmental degradation and genocide, respectively, based on their own interpretation of ideological understanding.

The researcher intends to examine these ideological disparities and establish if there is at all potential for transcending them. The study asks several crucial questions: Can we develop a holistic ideology dedicated to the protection of nature and humanity? How do we cross these ideological divides to improve the health of humans and the environment? Or is this somewhat of a utopian dream that can never be fulfilled due to the greed of mankind since the dawn of civilization? Finally, can theater and its playwrights enlighten the way for spectators and policymakers to eliminate such environmental atrocities? Based on a descriptive-analytical approach, this research will try to answer these pressing questions.

II. DISCUSSION

A. *The Absurdist*

Laila Al-Atrash's description of the protagonist in *Paper for Love*, the Absurdist, is not accidental; it summarizes the extreme disillusionment that defines human life. The description conforms with the representations in the plays of Absurdist writers like Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, and many others, who portrayed a world in which people are ill-equipped to find the universe or understand its mysteries. In this context, human life is represented as meaningless, without purpose, and full of ambiguity, and whatever sense of security is achievable is only in the world of imagination (Qasas, 2007, p. 110).

The Absurdist argues, “They eliminate the essence of life; they end a celestial being that had functioned according to the will of the Creator for a considerable period of time” (Al-Atrash, 2011).

Among the key reasons for the emergence of Absurdist Theater was the devastation wrought by World War II. The

war not only left a legacy of devastation but also annihilated moral and ethical norms, stripping life of its meaning and relegating man to an existential absurd situation. Al-Atrash substantiates this point through the following words of the Absurdist: “They killed, uprooted, corrupted, and were corrupted, plundered, monopolized, and assassinated innocence and love” (Al-Atrash, 2011).

Another cause of the rise of Absurdist Theater was the existential threat posed by nuclear warfare, particularly after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. According to the World Nuclear Association, the explosion of Little Boy, the bomb that fell on Hiroshima, was the equivalent of 16,000 tons of TNT and emitted a thermal energy pulse that instantly killed nearly a quarter of the city's inhabitants, with another quarter perishing in the ensuing months from radiation poisoning and cancer. Just three days later, the United States dropped a second atomic bomb, Fat Man, on Nagasaki. This contained 239 explosions with a total energy of 21,000 tons of TNT, causing devastation and loss of life that eerily was identical to Hiroshima's, with haunting shadows left behind—silent remnants of lives lived. The extensive damage forced Emperor Hirohito to declare Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945. These cities had then been identified by the United States as significant for military operations at that time. Nevertheless, as days passed, the long-term impacts of radiation exposure led to serious moral issues regarding the usage of nuclear bombs (Ali, Laila, 26/11/2023).

Despite the unanimous passing of Resolution 1540 by the United Nations Security Council on April 28, 2004, calling for all states to legislate and enact key measures to prevent the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and their means of delivery—coupled with the institution of adequate internal controls to prevent terrorists and criminal groups from gaining access to these extremely hazardous weapons (United Nations, 2024)—the realization of such resolutions has been predominantly lacking, remaining chiefly in the theoretical realm. Currently, the continued deaths of innocent people can be traced to the inability of the great powers to adhere to these resolutions, as compliance is usually in conflict with their defense needs in their pursuit of happiness for their own people, often at the expense of lesser powers and economically weaker nations.

Thus, Al-Atrash raises her voice, through the words of the Absurdist, denouncing what is happening on this planet in the hope that someone will listen and put an end to the destruction afflicting both nature and humanity.

The Absurdist continues to cry out, saying, “They were barbarians and merchants, explorers and colonizers. They defiled the land, pillaged its wealth, enraged its seas, and continue to kill in the name of love” (Al-Atrash, 2011).

Al-Atrash asserts that humankind has been the primary force behind the destruction of the Earth and its inhabitants. This notion is further supported by the Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, which states that, under the pretext of exploration, the indigenous people of the Americas—the Native Americans—were massacred. From a population of 20 million, only one million remained. The so-called “discoverer” of the Americas, Christopher Columbus, set sail before dawn on Friday, August 3, 1492, from the Spanish port of Palos aboard the three famous caravels—the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa Mar ía—crossing the Atlantic Ocean and reaching the Caribbean Islands on October 12, 1492. His discovery of the North American continent came later, during his second voyage in 1498 (Al Jazeera net, 2022).

Although Columbus is widely credited as the “discoverer of America,” this claim is historically inaccurate, according to some historians. The first humans to arrive in the Americas were its indigenous peoples, who migrated and settled there long before Columbus, and the continent was known to several maritime civilizations (Al Jazeera net, 2022).

What did the European armies do upon arriving? They slaughtered the indigenous inhabitants, seized their lands, and looted their wealth. The new settlers did not stop at eradicating the native population; they also enslaved Africans, whom Europeans forcibly transported across multiple historical periods to work under brutal conditions in the Americas.

For instance, rice was not originally known in the Americas. According to BBC documentation, “The journey of rice to the United States is a tale of peoples whose expertise and labor-built rice cultivation there. Between 1750 and 1775, more than 50,000 Africans were kidnapped from what was known as the Rice Coast—stretching from Guinea and Guinea-Bissau to western Côte d'Ivoire, the ancestral homeland of many African Americans. Today, the heart of this region lies in Sierra Leone and Liberia” (Tweety, 2021). These slaves toiled under harsh conditions in exchange for their survival and a morsel of food.

These are just historical examples of what humans have done to the earth and its vulnerable inhabitants. The researcher points out that this reality has not ended to this day. A case in point is Gaza, Palestine, where its people have been subjected to genocide for fifteen months, from October 7, 2023, until the writing of this paper. More than forty thousand children, women, and elderly people have been killed, and approximately one hundred thousand have been wounded.

Al-Atrash continues discussing wars through the voice of the Absurdist, stating:

From the wombs of life, they are born and nursed, only to be killed by the war-makers. Their childhoods are violated; they are handed over to hunger—who will protect a childhood cradled by the dreams of women? (Al-Atrash, 2011)

The researcher asserts that violence and wars deprive children of life and that war profiteers place weapons in their hands, forcing them to fight in organized armies. This is evident in African countries, where tribal conflicts—fueled by neo-colonialism—have been ignited to seize the region's wealth. Despite international efforts by human rights organizations, the United Nations, and its affiliated laws to curb child recruitment, and despite some success in certain countries, other nations still arm children and involve them in acts of violence. An example of this is Sudan, where the

ongoing civil war continues to exploit child soldiers (United Nations website, 2022).

In his research published in the *International Journal of Human Rights* under the title “Climate Aggression or the Aggression of Climate,” Jurgan argues that overcoming such issues is possible through the following measures:

1. Reducing social and economic marginalization
2. Developing equitable access to natural resources
3. Restricting access to weapons. (Zimmerer, 2014)

These proposals could help curb the escalation of violence between nations. The researcher references Uganda, Congo, Chad, and Somalia as examples where the United Nations has managed—albeit partially—to reduce violence rather than eliminate it entirely (Ibid.).

Through the voice of the Absurdist, Laila Al-Atrash raises a cry to the world, calling for the protection of childhood—not only from death or from becoming instruments of killing but also from poverty and starvation. In the voice of the Absurdist, she writes:

The Absurdist: “They drew the borders of life with banners of greed. The conflicts of power and prestige have harvested the bloom of existence. They sowed poverty and destitution, blanketing the expanse of life with sorrow and grief. They disturbed the eternal slumber of the stars with invasions that exceeded the bounds of the earth—violence, servitude, and enslavement. (Al-Atrash, 2011)

If human beings were central in the 1920s, with modernity promising the individual a position of importance alongside reformist ideals and freedoms, modernity ultimately failed to deliver on those promises. This was followed by postmodernism in the 1970s, which questioned modernity’s failure to achieve its intended goals and the collapse of grand narratives (Hutcheon, 2009). Consequently, poverty, hunger, murder, and enslavement of the individual increased. The humanist ideals of modernity, which placed the individual at the pinnacle of priorities, striving for happiness and well-being while elevating them above materialism and nature, ultimately collapsed.

With this collapse, postmodernism emerged in the 1970s, producing results that, as Weber (2019) described, led to the loss of human centrality and superiority over nature and matter, reducing the human being to an indistinguishable part of the material world—devoid of reference, purpose, or humanity. Consequently, nothing prevents their starvation or differentiates them from mere objects; they can be violated just as material and nature are violated. This notion is reinforced by Al-Atrash through the voice of the Absurdist, who calls for a reexamination of these violations against humanity.

Al-Atrash concludes her work with a series of hopeful declarations voiced by the Absurdist:

Humankind will reclaim its innate nature.” Humanity, after all, is inherently good and must return to its essence. Religious differences will no longer fuel conflicts— ‘Glory and eternity to a love that knows no divisions.’ The children of the future will live in peace— ‘A woman awaits the fruit of her womb.’ In the end, there is a call to resist human greed and return to a lush, thriving Earth with fresh waters. (Al-Atrash, 2011)

As the Absurdist proclaims, “Glory to a planet that resists human greed—beautiful, pure, and its cradle green” (Al-Atrash, 2011).

B. *The Capitalist*

In her play *Paper for Love*, Laila Al-Atrash examines capitalism’s stance on labor exploitation and monopolization. As Chris William states, “The driving force of capitalism is the acquisition of capital, and for that purpose, all-natural and social relationships are subordinated to this fundamental goal, showing no respect for anything that stands in its way” (William, 2010, p. 80).

When faced with death, people tend to reflect on their lives. In *Paper for Love*, as the characters seek refuge from toxic gases in a shelter, the capitalist’s true character comes to light—his past actions are exposed as confessions before death, a final attempt at absolution. The capitalist figure in Al-Atrash’s work bears a resemblance to the character of Puntila in Bertolt Brecht’s play *Mr. Puntila and His Man Matti*, written in 1940 during Brecht’s exile in Finland.

Brecht’s play presents the behavior of this so-called “extinct creature”—Matti—describing him as insatiable and ultimately useless. When intoxicated, Puntila becomes a kind-hearted man, compassionate toward workers and the poor. In these moments, he wishes to dissolve the class barriers that separate him from them, sitting among them, sharing meals, and even enduring hardship alongside them. He considers the possibility of marrying off his only daughter to his carriage driver, commending the man for virility and honesty. However, when he sobers up, it turns out that his sentiments were based on an emotional rather than a rational foundation—on his unconscious, not his conscious mind. He later transforms into a true predator, with the tools typical of an exploiter, thus revealing the intrinsic cruelty and deceit of the exploiting class. Once sober, he becomes ruthless with the poor, fiercely protective of his forests and wealth, and harsh toward his servant, Matti—accusing him of taking advantage of his drunken weakness, conspiring to steal his daughter, plundering his estate, and ruining his home. He retracts all the kind words and promises he made while drunk, disowning the actions that momentarily revealed his true self—the self that should have been his real identity, the human essence buried beneath layers of class conventions that force individuals to deny their nature.

Although Puntila belongs to the feudal system that collapsed after the Industrial Revolution in Europe, his counterpart emerged under capitalism, which, as previously mentioned, disregards all moral considerations in pursuit of its objectives.

Comparing Puntila and the capitalist in Al-Atrash’s play, the researcher notes that both characters undergo temporary

transformations influenced by external factors—intoxication in Puntila’s case and exposure to toxic gases in the capitalist’s case—prompting them to momentarily renounce their corrupt actions. Puntila’s behavior has been discussed above, and the capitalist’s promises, made in the shelter as he fears for his life, are equally revealing:

If we survive, I will never ignore a donation request or evade taxes again. I will fire my corrupt accountant. I will grant workers all their rights, past and future. If I make it out alive, I will distribute one of my sugar warehouses to the poor. I will break my market monopoly so that anyone can buy sweets. I will apologize for my threats and tyranny. My Lord, I will return everything I have taken—just let me leave this place alive, and I will make the pilgrimage to Your sacred house. I will sever ties with the corrupt—just let me leave this place alive. (Al-Atrash, 2011)

In capitalist discourse, workers are often exploited, and their rights are denied. This is precisely what the West now adopts and defends by reducing human beings to mere commodities subject to supply and demand rather than competence. This leads to the accumulation of capital at the expense of workers’ and consumers’ rights. Fromm (1989) states that capitalist societies rely on the principle of political freedom on the one hand and the market as the regulator of economic relations on the other, making it also the organizer of social relations. The commodity market is controlled by the capitalist, who determines the values upon which workers’ wages are based. If there are human skills and labor for which there is no demand under prevailing market conditions, they hold no exchange value. Consequently, human beings themselves have become commodities subjected to the laws of supply and demand.

In the play under study, it becomes evident that the capitalist exploits workers and fails to pay them the wages they deserve. However, when he faces death or senses the approach of his demise due to an unexpected crisis—the emission of toxic gases—he undergoes a shift. Whether consciously aware or not, he is among those responsible for these emissions, whether from industrial factories or carbon emissions from agricultural greenhouses. Glairon (2023) notes, “Greenhouses have become major emitters of gases, leading to significant climate disruptions that have severely affected water quality, particularly in the world’s poorest countries” (colorado.edu).

Here, the capitalist finds himself a victim of his own greed, a path that not only leads to his potential death but also to environmental and human destruction.

Moreover, the capitalist does not merely reduce workers to commodities; as Al-Atrash mentions, he resorts to monopolizing the market to increase his profits at the expense of consumers. According to the International Encyclopedia of Social Behavior, capitalist monopoly refers to a form of capitalism in which a few large corporations dominate the market, reducing competition and thereby negatively impacting consumers and society (International Encyclopedia of Social Behavior, 2015). In Al-Atrash’s text, the capitalist monopolizes sugar, inflating its prices to maximize profits.

However, when confronted with the threat of death due to toxic gas emissions, he suddenly vows to grant workers their rights, break his monopolies, and embark on a pilgrimage to the sacred Kaaba. This brings us to the issue of religious hypocrisy—specifically, hypocrisy in faith. The capitalist only recalls religious obligations when facing death. The Quran explains this conduct by stating, “They show off to people and remember Allah only a little” (Surah An-Nisa, 4:142). Also, Surah Al-Baqara states, “They [think to] deceive Allah and those who believe, but they deceive not except themselves and perceive [it] not” (2:9). Faced with the certainty of death, the capitalist tries to deceive God by claiming to perform pilgrimage and abandon his exploitative philosophy, thus embracing a mask of religiosity due to his unfavorable situation—trying to escape the consequences of his past actions. Also, the Quran outlines the inherent traits of hypocrites:

Allah is fully aware of those among you who hinder and those who say, “We believe,” but have no faith whatsoever. They seek to deceive Allah and the believers but deceive only themselves. When fear creeps in, one sees them looking at you with a nervous face, eyes shrinking as though they were upon death. However, when fear departs from them, they face you with stern words out of greed. These people are not believers at all. As such, Allah has made their efforts futile, which means very little to Allah. (Al-Ahzab, 33:18-19)

Thus, the capitalist sheds his capitalist ideology, replacing it with a false religious stance—one that will fade the moment the threat disappears.

C. *The Extremist Islamist Brother and the Loving Sister*

In addition to the absurdist and the capitalist, Laila Al-Atrash presents those who see her play with two other characters for discussion—a brother and sister who have sought refuge in the shelter, fearing death from toxic gases. The brother is a social and religious extremist, while the sister is enlightened and in love. He threatens to kill her once they leave the shelter, as love, in his view, is an unforgivable honor crime for women. To him, she faces only two fates: either she perishes in the gas, or he kills her if they survive. The extremist brother declares, “Retribution and God’s will shall be executed by His hand or mine” (Al-Atrash, 2011).

Religious extremists, especially those in some Eastern Islamic societies, believe that if a woman falls in love, God will punish her for this sin. In the case at hand, that punishment is death by the toxic gases. If she survives, her brother will carry out the divine decree himself. He ignores the words of Sheikh Khaled El-Gendy, a member of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (2021), who stated, “Love and hatred are divine gifts, beginning with the love of God Almighty”.

However, scholars have disagreed on the interpretation of love between men and women. Some issue fatwas, as seen

on the Fatwa of Islamic Network, (2009), ruling on love as follows:

The ruling on love depends on its nature. If one confesses love to those to whom it is permissible—such as parents, children, or spouses—it fosters affection and mercy. However, if it is between two people for whom a relationship is not permissible—such as an unrelated man and woman—Islam does not recognize anything between them except lawful marriage. Anything beyond that is the work of the devil, which a Muslim must avoid and beware of.

The extremist brother firmly states his position on his sister's love for a man, without considering any outcome other than punishment—specifically, death:

Brother: There is no alternative—fire before dishonor if we survive.

Brother: Love unblessed by people deserves death. (Al-Atrash, 2011)

Islam does not sanction the killing of a woman for falling in love. What the brother proclaims is an extremist claim, rooted in ignorance of Islam. To refute this, the researcher cites the views of less rigid scholars, particularly Dr. Ali Gomaa, former Grand Mufti of Egypt (2025), who states in a religious lesson broadcast on Egypt's Channel One, "Love itself is not forbidden. Whether they marry or not is a separate matter".

Dr. Ali further explains in the same discussion, "A man's love for a woman does not necessarily obligate him to marry her".

Yet, while permitting love as God has permitted it, he sets conditions for relationships between men and women: "No secrecy—the relationship must be public. Avoiding forbidden acts—prohibiting seclusion and desire outside a lawful contract".

In *Paper for Love*, Al-Atrash, through the extremist brother's voice, portrays him as feeling compelled to carry out retribution against his sister in the name of God, stating, "I am forced to exact justice. He who holds our life and death knows that the Angel of Death manifests in different forms—so let His name be blessed" (Al-Atrash, 2011).

The brother violates the divine decree of Allah, which is as follows: "And whoever intentionally kills a believer—his reward is Hell, wherein he shall remain forever, and Allah will inflict His wrath upon him and will curse him and has prepared for him a great punishment" (Surah An-Nisa, Verse 93). This brother understands nothing of Islam; rather, he merely echoes the words of the ignorant when dealing with such cases. In the researcher's view, ignorance is the root of extremism. He has no right to exact retribution against his sister in this world, for the right to retribution belongs to Allah alone in the Hereafter. If he commits murder, the ruling is clear in the Qur'anic Surah An-Nisa, Verse 93: "Hell, Allah's wrath upon him, His curse, and a severe torment prepared for him." Moreover, nowhere in the Qur'an is there any evidence that permits the killing of a woman for loving a man.

Returning to the subject of this study, the extremist's view regarding the cause of the gas disaster that forced them into the situation is when the brother states, "This is the punishment for disbelief, debauchery, and atheism" (Al-Atrash, 2011). In his view, this catastrophe was inflicted by Allah as retribution for people's disbelief, immorality, and atheism. In response to this extremist ideology, the researcher cites Izzat (2024) stating that Dr. Muhammad Muhanna, a professor of Sharia and Law at Al-Azhar University, who discusses the link between religious extremism and radical thought: "Islam does not condone fanaticism. Religion does not endorse extremism. Extremism leads to violence, bloodshed, the violation of human dignity and property, and terrorism, while the perpetrators believe they are doing righteous deeds" (Alwatan News.Web).

The researcher here refutes the extremist brother's ideas, starting with his desire to kill his sister when he spoke of violence and bloodshed, believing he was carrying out religious teachings while accusing people of immorality and atheism. However, he is entirely detached from these teachings, for Islam neither condones fanaticism nor extremism.

The debate in Islamic discourse regarding natural disasters revolves around two perspectives. The first aligns with the extremist brother's view that the spread of harmful gases is due to disbelief and immorality. According to Mu'taz Al-Khatib (2023), a professor of moral philosophy at the College of Islamic Studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, this perspective emphasizes the idea of divine punishment, asserting that natural phenomena such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and volcanoes serve as divine retribution upon those who experience them due to their polytheism and sins. The researcher considers this perspective narrow-minded and extreme.

Conversely, a second perspective, adopted by non-extremist Muslims, interprets these phenomena as tests—an advanced stage of trial meant to challenge individuals. The term "trial" itself conveys the notion of a test through hardship, and human existence in this world is inherently tied to being tested. Everything that befalls individuals or communities as part of divine decrees affecting their lives is a form of trial. As the Quran states in Surah Al-Anbiya, Verse 35: "Every soul will taste death, and We test you with both hardship and prosperity as a trial, and to Us, you will return".

A trial signifies proximity to God or His favor. Professor Malaba (2023) describes the first perspective as flawed, as it reduces the concept of trial to mere punishment, thereby misinterpreting the broader meaning of trials and misrepresenting the texts of the Quran and Hadith. This Islamic concept stands in stark contrast to the extremist brother's interpretation.

Notably, Islam is not the only religion in which natural disasters have historically been linked to human moral corruption. As Mala'ba (2023) notes,

Throughout history, scholars and religious interpreters across various faiths have attributed natural disasters to

human misconduct, believing that divine punishment ensues as a result. Meanwhile, secular thought has distanced itself from this idea, arguing that natural disasters affect both the pious and the irreligious alike. (Alazeera.net)

D. *The Religion Enthusiast and the Religion Devotee*

Al-Atrash presents another dilemma through two characters she calls the Religion Enthusiast and the Religion Devotee, a man and a woman from different faiths who fall in love, regardless of their respective beliefs. They had attended a gathering before seeking refuge from the toxic gases.

The researcher first examines their relationship from their perspective before exploring their stance on the surrounding destruction and its causes.

The Religion Devotee states, “We met by an evening's chance, and when I awoke, I could not find my heart. I hid you in my pillow, in my eyes, and within my words. How deeply I love you” (Al-Atrash, 2011).

From this, it is evident that the lovers met without questioning their religious differences; love and passion took root in their hearts, and they could not resist it. The researcher asks, “What happens when two individuals from different religions fall in love? Is religion not about love?” As the Bible states in 1 John 4:16, “God is love; therefore, those who live in love also live in God, and God in them” (bibleref.com).

The Bible also states:

Affection is marked by patience and kindness. It is free from envy, boasts not, and is free from arrogance. It does not show rudeness, is not easily angered, and does not keep a record of wrongs. It takes no joy in evil but delights in the truth. (Holy Bible, Corinthians 13:4)

Islam outlines the notion of love, with particular focus on the love for God and His Prophet. However, romantic love is mostly explored in the context of marriage, as expressed in the Quran:

Among His signs is the creation of mates from among your own kind, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and compassion between you. Indeed, in this are signs for those who reflect. (Quran, Surah AR-Rum, Verse: 21)

Thus, in Islam, marriage is the ultimate fulfillment of love. All three religions agree that love is first and foremost directed toward God. But what about people who have already fallen in love?

Abdel Wahab Zaouqa (2018) states:

Love cannot be reduced to a simple material definition. Love defies explanation and interpretation—it is not merely a chemical reaction or a poem penned past midnight in a moment of despair. Love is what has sustained this world for centuries. Whenever love disappears, destruction takes its place. The words of lovers turn into bombs that demolish homes, and flowers transform into graves that consume the bodies of children. (Aljazeera.Net)

For Zaouqa, love is not confined to a single definition. He advocates for love among all humanity, arguing that its absence leads to devastation—precisely what unfolds in the play under study. What, then, has driven humanity to inflict harm upon itself through bombs and toxic gases? The researcher has already explored some of these causes, yet the case of The Religion Enthusiast and The Religion Devotee is unique. Al-Atrash justifies their love across religious lines through the voice of The Religion Enthusiast:

There are no barriers under one sky and one God. We are humans, living and dying according to His decrees, yet they have turned His love into daggers of division. The heavens have gates from which prophets emerged in every direction, only to reunite on the same path—there is no other. God is love, God is love. (Al-Atrash, 2011)

The lover justifies his affection for a woman of a different faith by asserting that God is one and that all prophets emerged with the same call to love Him. However, it was people who created barriers and divisions. Zaouqa (2018) supports this notion, stating:

If we consider marriage—the culmination of love and emotion—we find that most religious doctrines impose restrictions on interfaith unions. In many cases, even differences within the same sect or tradition pose obstacles. Most churches and Christian denominations deem marriage outside the faith contrary to the teachings of God and the Church. (Aljazeera.Net)

However, such barriers have largely disappeared in the West due to the implementation of unified civil laws. Nevertheless, they persist within conservative families, who continue to uphold them to this day.

On the other hand, Islam has a different view on this subject. Most Islamic theological schools permit a Muslim man to marry a woman from the People of the Book (a follower of Jewish or Christian faith). This is expressed in the Quran, Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse 5:

The Almighty has made lawful for you all that is good and clean. The food of the People of the Book is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them. Also, chaste women among the believers and chaste women among those to whom the Scriptures were given before you are lawful to you, as long as you give them their bridal-due and desire chastity, not going into unlawful sexual relations or taking them as girlfriends.

However, Islamic teachings disallow a Muslim woman from marrying a non-Muslim male (Zaouqa, Abdel Wahab, 2018). Likewise, in Judaism, interfaith marriages are absolutely prohibited: “A Jewish man may not marry a non-Jewish woman, and vice versa” (Sud, 2000, p. 120).

The Devotee of Religions says, “O Lord of the worlds, O Creator of hearts filled with love and passion, their hearts have been tainted by the darkness of discord” (Al-Atrash, 2011).

The researcher posits that God is the one who created love—love for Him, for His messengers, and among human beings. However, what is evident from all that has been presented is the consensus on the love of God, while there is no agreement on love among humans themselves.

Regarding the second part of this study, which explores how the lovers of religions perceive natural disasters—symbolized in our play by toxic gases—their love for God and for each other serves as the benchmark for their stance. Again, the Devotee of Religions states, “They severed all contact with the world. The gods of destruction dictate the fate of humanity, and the path has been lost for those like us who seek life” (Al-Atrash, 2011).

The ambitions and audacity of humankind have reached the point of spreading toxic gases in that unspecified location depicted in the play under study. All contact with the outside world was cut off to prevent them from seeking help, as if the goal was their extermination. Humanity is no longer in control of its own fate; instead, its destiny is dictated by the gods of destruction—led by a group of economically and politically dominant corporations (cartels). The absence of love among human beings further exacerbates the crisis, bringing us back to Zaouqa’s (2018) words: “There is a common denominator between love and war: when love disappears among people in a given geographical area, it is replaced by the specter of war” (AlJazeera.Net).

In the end, after the threat of toxic gases subsides, the lovers of religions make a final decision: they choose not to leave their shelter, entrusting themselves to God’s mercy. If they were not destined to unite in life due to religious differences, then they shall meet in the hereafter and be united in death. There is no salvation from human greed, no absolution for love, as Sheikh Khaled Al-Jundi, a member of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (2009), affirms, “Love and hatred are divine gifts” (p. 2309).

So, how can we deny this divine gift, and by what right?

Devotee of Religions: “May God have mercy on us.”

Devotee of Religions: “Let us remain here, for death shall unite us.”

Devotee of Religions: “There is no lifeline and no absolution for love.” (Al-Atrash, 2011)

Finally, as Martin Crook and Damien Short (2014) stated, “These acts of barbarism and destruction must be classified as criminal offenses punishable by law” (p. 231).

III. CONCLUSION

The researcher concludes that theater must serve as an alarm bell, addressing environmental issues and the need for protection—not only in children’s theater, which is crucial; however, in adult and professional theater, it is used as a means of enlightenment to prevent both human and ecological genocide. The study further finds that the ideology of the absurdist calls for an end to wars, an end to the exploitation of children, and the eradication of famines, while resisting human greed and advocating for a world that is beautiful, pure, and abundant.

Moreover, the research reveals that in the face of the gas crisis, capitalists shed their capitalist ideology—responsible for the planet’s destruction—and replace it with a false religious identity, specifically a deceptive Islamic ideology, promising to abandon their exploitation if they survive. However, these promises vanish the moment the danger passes. Additionally, the study finds that extremist Islamic clerics attribute the gas catastrophe to people straying from their faith, forgetting that Islam does not endorse fanaticism or extremism and that, according to Islamic teachings, violence leads only to bloodshed and terrorism.

As for the lovers of religions, who have fallen in love despite their differing faiths, they perceive the catastrophe engulfing the planet as a result of the darkness of discord and the inability to accept one another. They believe that God is love in all religions and that He could never be the source of harm to the world and the people He created.

Ultimately, despite international efforts to establish laws aimed at preventing genocide and environmental destruction, the researcher concludes that such efforts, while significant, remain insufficient and ineffective. Binding international resolutions are required—ones that hold all nations accountable, without exception, including the powerful as well as the weak—so that this planet may survive in peace.

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Majd Qasas received her Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from Jordan University in 1980. In 2003, she earned a Bachelor's Degree in Acting and Directing from Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan, and the following year, she completed her M.A. in Physical Theater from Royal Holloway, University of London. In 2014, she obtained a Ph.D. in Theater from the Lebanese University in Beirut, Lebanon. Since 2019, Dr. Qasas has been an Associate Professor in the Department of Theater at Jordan University. In addition, she is a theater actress and director, has worked in 75 plays, and has authored three academic books on theater. She has also participated in numerous Arabic international festivals.