

Original Research Article

Trauma narrative and coexistence pursuit: Visions of a shared human community in post-9/11 fiction

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Abstract: The 9/11 attacks reshaped global perceptions of security, identity and interconnection amid contradictory globalization. Post-9/11 novels respond to contemporary crises through literary creation, embodying shared human community awareness in trauma narration, cultural reflection and ethical exploration. Following the framework of "depicting global communal dilemma – examining root factors – rebuilding shared coexistence pathways", this paper adopts close reading and historical criticism to analyze representative works. It discusses how post-9/11 fictions turn terrorist violence into metaphors for human existential dilemmas, illustrates their artistic expressions of racial inclusiveness, cross-cultural communication and ecological coexistence, and clarifies the theoretical and practical value of such works in the globalized age.

Keywords: post-9/11 fiction; shared human community; global communal dilemma; cross-cultural communication; ecological coexistence

1. Era risks and research context: Research review of communal themes in post-9/11 works

The 9/11 incident shattered the post-Cold War global order and ushered humanity into an uncertain risk era. Emerging post-9/11 novels transcend mere event documentation, integrating terrorism, ethnic conflict and ecological breakdown into cross-national narratives to interpret collective human fate, forming distinct shared human community writing features.

Existing research analyzes these novels via trauma theory, postcolonial criticism and narrative ethics. Academic researchers such as Kaplan, Gray and Dan Hansong have established fundamental theoretical frameworks for relevant discussions. Even so, existing scholarship predominantly focuses on individual traumatic experiences and cross-cultural frictions, while lacking systematic collation of the communal consciousness embedded in literary texts. Few studies adopt the complete research chain of dilemma presentation, cause exploration and solution construction; Zeng Guigui's research, which centers on a single work, fails to reveal the universal thematic meaning across all post-9/11 novels.

As an innovative theoretical framework, the vision of a Shared Human Community enables new interpretations of post-9/11 literary works. This paper systematically analyzes three core dimensions of the novels: Their representation of global community divides, their critical interrogation of the roots of shared dilemmas, and their literary exploration of possible reconstruction pathways. It not only enriches the literary connotations of shared human community, but also clarifies the aesthetic implications and real-world reference value of post-9/11 novels as a typical form of communal writing.

2. Catastrophe narratives: Multi-layered global survival dilemmas in post-9/11 texts

Post-9/11 novels use 9/11 as a metaphor for human communal breakdown, depicting three layered global existential predicaments to awaken readers' shared community awareness.

Collective trauma runs as a central narrative line through post-9/11 literary works. Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* constructs a cross-racial, cross-class trauma panorama through over a dozen New

York characters. Their intertwined sorrow demonstrates shared human vulnerability under disaster. The novel's remark that grief hangs over the whole city highlights the ability of shared traumatic experiences to dissolve individual seclusion.

Zero K extends personal terrorist trauma to universal existential anxiety. Survivor James Finn's persistent fear of sudden collapse reflects widespread global unease brought by terrorism, geopolitical turbulence and public health threats, highlighting the inseparable bond between individuals and humanity as a whole.

Post-9/11 Western Islamophobia and ethnic labeling widen civilizational rifts, which novels criticize sharply. In Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Pakistani protagonist Changez gradually becomes a racialized "other" in the U.S., suffering identity discrimination rooted in religious and racial prejudice. His failed romance with American Erica symbolizes broken cross-cultural communication, exposing how mutual prejudice fragments human community. Perveen points out that these fictions reveal ethnic segregation's damage to global coexistence and advocate mutual understanding to bridge civilizational gaps.

Ecological deterioration is a vital communal dilemma dimension. Powers' *The Echo Maker* follows ornithologist Sandra's protection of sandhill cranes, illustrating how industrial development destroys migratory channels and disrupts the interconnected global ecosystem. McCarthy's *The Road* depicts a post-nuclear apocalyptic wasteland, where father and son's harsh survival reflects catastrophic consequences of anthropocentric exploitation of nature. Both texts stress that humans and nature form an inseparable life community; ecological destruction will ultimately harm humanity itself.

3. Root criticism: Three structural conflicts shattering global communal order

Beyond surface-level conflict narration, these novels excavate three fundamental structural factors triggering communal fragmentation.

Explicit and implicit racial discrimination creates rigid "us/them" binary opposition. In Amis' *The Second Plane*, long-term marginalization pushes Pakistani immigrant descendant Muhammad Mawoot toward extremism, proving sustained ethnic exclusion deprives minorities of belonging and fuels radical ideas. Western suspicion of Muslim groups and reciprocal anti-Western sentiment in Islamic societies form a vicious polarization cycle, destabilizing domestic and international communities alike.

The so-called "clash of civilizations" is a Western hegemonic discourse designed to justify global resource plunder. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez realizes U.S. "democracy and freedom" rhetoric serves overseas expansion, which directly sparks cross-cultural conflict. Civilization differences don't generate clashes themselves. Actually, the root lies in insufficient mutual respect and equal communication. In *Let the Great World Spin*, the characters from different cultures achieve emotional connection through shared trauma. This aligns with Delanty's viewpoint that tolerance amid diversities can generate a genuine community.

Capital's greedy pursuit of profit drives predatory exploitation of nature. In *The Echo Maker*, corporations seek profits endlessly, which ruins wetland habitats and furthermore break ecological balance. Developed countries cut down polluting industries in their own nation, and transfer to less developed regions and countries, forming an unequal global ecological order. The apocalyptic landscape in *The Road* represents the inevitable outcome of capital-centered growth. Scholars including Daban Jaff stress that ecological crises concern all nations. The reality demands societies to move beyond egoistic capitalist reasoning, and join global environmental protection.

4. Literary redemption: Feasible pathways for building a shared human community

Rather than wallowing in despair, post-9/11 novels propose three viable literary solutions, which align with the shared coexistence vision.

A unified community is based on empathy and shared grief. In *Let the Great World Spin*, people from different cultures join mourning activities together, which eliminate racial and class barriers, and build a communal bond. Accordingly, a shared humanity comes into being. As Faludi argues, collective mourning

after 9/11 makes individuals recognize that their destiny is shared with strangers. In *Zero K*, trauma support groups pull James Finn out of self-isolation, which proves emotional resonance can serve as a universal bridge across different cultures and identities.

The Novels dismiss cultural superiority and unilateralism, endorsing equal cross-cultural exchange. The dialogue between Changez and the CIA agent at the end of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* demonstrates that sincere communication is the most effective way to ease conflict. Similarly, the coexisting of characters in *Let the Great* illustrate that inclusive community respects difference, and pursue common interests. This echoes the core principle that civilizations flourish through exchange and mutual learning.

The novels call for abandoning anthropocentrism to achieve human-nature harmony. In *The Road*, the father and son persist in gentle ecological ethics against ruin. They refuse predatory resource exploitation, and preserve hope for future generations. Sandra's crane protection in *The Echo Maker* symbolizes the recovery of balanced life cycles, highlighting interdependent relationship of all species. As Feenberg notes, these ecological narratives add a critical environmental dimension to the construction of a shared human community, effectively pushing ecological governance to the center of global agendas.

5. Aesthetic value and realistic reflection: Contemporary enlightenments of communal writing in post-9/11 fiction

Post-9/11 novels illustrate global human survival dilemmas through literary expression. They frame the 9/11 tragedy as a powerful metaphor about communal collapse, depict shared human fate via trauma, ethnic division and ecological crisis narration, and further reflect on systemic roots, ranging from racism, hegemonism and capitalist greed. Ultimately, they put forward three reconstruction orientations: Empathetic mourning community, equal cross-cultural dialogue, and human-nature ecological coexistence.

Theoretically, these works enrich literary interpretations of the Shared Human Community. Most prior research discusses this concept from political, economic or diplomatic angles; post-9/11 fictions translate abstract theory into tangible characters and plots, strengthening the concept's emotional appeal. Practically, their advocacy of racial inclusion, cross-civilization communication and ecological coexistence offers valuable inspiration for tackling terrorism, cultural friction and environmental degradation. In an era full of global risks, the novels urge humanity to set aside prejudice and unite to face shared challenges.

As J. Hillis Miller argues, literature opens up space for readers to feel joys and pains of the other people. By engaging with these perspectives, people can move beyond the restrictions of individual experience, and develop a stronger sense of belonging within wider communities. Post-9/11 novels bear profound ideological meanings and unique artistic appeal. They constitute an important literary force that advances the vision of shared coexistence. These texts capture the anxiety of the post-9/11 age, and at the same time articulate humanity's universal longing for a harmonious, united world.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Submission declaration

This manuscript is my original work, has not been published elsewhere in any form or language, and is

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