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Exploring Race and Identity in Don DeLillo's "White Noise" and "Mao II": Semiotic and Spatial Semantic Intersections

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Abstract:

This article explores Don DeLillo's representation of the dynamics of race and identity in the American society in his two celebrated novels, White Noise (1985) and Mao II (1991) with a particular emphasis on the semiotic devices and the opposition between urban and suburban spaces. The novels, while not overtly centered on race, offer subtle insights on the reality of race and identity in the American society in different contexts. In White Noise, DeLillo interweaves with a great deal of delicacies his critique of the consumer society and media saturation with his criticism of the racial cultural insularity and the latent racial prejudices that pervade much of the American suburbs. In a quite different way, Mao II sets the issues against a multiracial and multicultural urban setting, with special emphasis on the representation of Arabo-Muslim world.

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Introduction

Over the last three decades, Don DeLillo has become one of the major American novelists profoundly engaged in exploring the psychological, cultural and social impacts of postmodern and postindustrial consumer society. His fiction is known, indeed, to be concerned with the complexities of postmodern life with its deadly threats of national and international terrorism, and the "derealization" of the reality by advanced technology and hypermedia saturation, that blur the line between the real and the simulated (Marchese, 2020: 1). It is equally true of much of his work to give precedence to the ways this reality impacts on the human psyche over individual concerns such as identity, race, culture, or gender. DeLillo inscribes, also, within this general tendency of postmodern American writers who made of paranoia and conspiracy theories prominent themes in their fiction. Most of his works, whether in "White Noise" (1985), "Mao II" (1991), "Underworld" (1997), "Libra" (1988), "Falling Man" (2007) or "Zero K" (2016), all of them express a sort of pervasive feeling of existential anxieties and social angers. Furthermore, globalization, along with economic and cultural transnationalism, has led to a surge in feelings of catastrophism, vulnerability, paranoid persecution, and xenophobia. This is not exclusive to DeLillo, other prominent writers, such as Thomas Pynchon in "V" (1963), "The Crying of Lot 49" (1966), and "Gravity's Rainbow" (1973), also exhibit similar feelings. In addition to this general suspicion in the establishment and official discourses, the postmodern generation of writers perceives the way America imposes its culture, language, and way of life on the rest of the world through globalization, constitutes dangerous infringements on individual freedom and cultural identities. (Kaur, 2O14: 75). Their works often articulate an unseen paranoia that looms over the world, akin to a form of "white noise." It is even thought that American literature has been so preoccupied by paranoia and conspiracy theory at both the national and international levels that it made of it a distinct literary form.

However, a careful analysis of many of DeLillo's novels would reveal that they are also subtle explorations of the intricate issues of race and identity in the American society. Their underlying presence and significant impact on the narratives structures and thematic developments are all the more palpable in almost all his fiction. This study investigates the complex intersections between the challenges of the above-mentioned preoccupations and the issues of race and identity in the American postmodern context, both in global and domestic settings, as explored in "White Noise" (1985) and "Mao II" (1991). By dissecting key characters and narrative techniques in the two novels, this analysis seeks to uncover the skillful ways with which DeLillo weaves the theme of race and national identity within his social and cultural criticism of the American society.

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The study focuses on the ways the fragmented nature of postmodern life, with its layers of media, technology, and consumerism, intersects with various axes of identity, and shapes the individual's sense of belonging and his perception and reaction to otherness. This exploration is not only relevant for a deeper understanding of DeLillo's work but also for appreciating the subtleties with which race informs and shapes American cultural imagination.

2. Methodology

Published in 1991, "White Noise" is a complex novel that initially appears to focus essentially as its very title indicates on postmodern issues like postmodern consumer culture, the oppression of hypermediated society, and fear from man-made lethal threats. However; the narrative subtly alludes to another danger that threatens the very foundation of American Western identity. The majority of the narrative takes place in and around the College-on-the-Hill Institute in Blacksmith town, which is, in fact, much more than a mere suburban space to serve as the last refuge for white people like the Gladney white family from the racial confusions of the roaring cities. The town is, actually, an archetypal American suburb, and the fact that it lacks a specific geographical location, allows it to be any suburban place in the United States (Hwang, 2015: 339). The story revolves around Jack Gladney, a professor who has built a reputation on Hitler Studies, a profession that prompts the reader to relate the novel to the historical acute racial tensions and identity crisis that shook the Occidental world at a given moment of its history. Effectively, even though it is never explicitly discussed, Jack's profession echoes the Second World War, with its racial purity and genocides. The ironical juxtaposition between Jack's existential fear of death and his focus on a historical figure synonymous with racial purification is an indication of DeLillo's subtle weaving of race within other social concerns.

Very early, Jack sets the novel's racial tones. While in the supermarket with his wife Babette and a colleague, named Murray, he notices that most of the products even foreign made are packaged in white, and Murray speaking for all, confesses that although this form packaging is lacking flavor, still it attracts him and buys the product because he feels that he is "contributing to some kind of spiritual consensus. It's like World War II. Everything is white" (DeLillo,1985: 18). This conflation between "human and nonhuman agencies", as Alworth, D. J. would say, is the narrative's powerfully device to mean that the repeated use of the adjective "white" in the passage refers not only to the listed objects, but it is also the color of a whole environment with its identity and culture (Alworth, 2010: 313). The scene is a symbolic allusion to the inherited tendency of middle-class

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white Americans to identify themselves and other people by their skin color, race, and ethnicity. Additionally, the direct allusion to the Second World War invokes an episode of racially-based genocides and the white man's sense of guilt and shame over his own history. This complicated relationship of white Americans with their history is subtly ironized by the fact that the main character is a professor of Hitler Studies but does speak German and, more importantly, never mentions the Holocaust in his teaching of Hitler's history.

The second is even stranger because Murray, Jack's colleague at the college, is of Jewish origin and seems very accommodated with Jack's indifference to Hitler's treatment of his own race. Ostensibly, DeLillo is satirizing the amnesia that stuck all Americans from various origins about their history with race and racism, and whether Jack the white or Murray the racialized, both seem to have no historical awareness. Repressing what is painful and shameful about the past seems to be the only way left for a category of Americans to cling to the vain belief in the racially and culturally homogeneous American society that the suburban spaces stand for. David Mikics' analysis of Pynchon's "Gravity Rainbow" (1973) in "Postmodern Fictions" (2004), which focuses on Americans' relationship with their past, can readily be applicable to DeLillo's "White Noise". Mikics argues that the problem Americans have with their past is the oblivion from the collective and national memory of those "Things past and lost", that is the excluded from basic social rights, the lynching of slaves, the Natives' genocide and anything linked to Vietnam (Mikics, 2004: 199).

In a totally different context, "Mao II" also displays even more directly concerns with race and identity. The novel focusses on the reclusive writer Bill Gray and his interactions with various other characters in Middle Eastern context. Its themes delve into some antagonistic concepts such as individualism versus collectivism, art and terrorism, and the impact of global politics on individual lives. The narrative thoroughly examines the psychological and cultural repercussions of terrorism and media saturation, and explores how these influences shape both the collective and individual consciousness. Alongside, the association of Arab characters with terrorism directly touches on racial or cultural issues, and ostensibly draws to a large extent on popular orientalism and stereotypes, connecting Islam and the Middle East to terrorism and genuine threats to the Western world.

Broadly speaking, the two novels delve into the complex concept of otherness in various contexts and seek to connect aesthetics with politics. Additionally, they boldly examine the potential link between race and identity, taking into account geopolitical and ideological factors. Therefore, race and identity representation in the two novels needs to be explored within thematic variables such as Cold War

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politics, consumerism, media saturation, and finally urban and suburban dichotomy. Thus, White Noise's existential concerns with life and death and consumer society ethics, “Mao II” engagement with international terrorism, and Cold War politics would serve as the backdrops against which the novels' racial and cultural narratives unfold.

2.1. Semiotics: Cultural Symbolic of the Sign

This study posits that, as Wiley, N. (1996) argues in The Semiotic Self, the surrounding signs and sounds, such as language, advertising, brands, and acronyms, play an important role in shaping the perception of the self in opposition to otherness and thus significantly impact the sense of belonging and identity (Wiley, 1995: 37). Ferdinand de Saussure has already highlighted the significance of signs in human civilization and culture, advocating for a scientific discipline called "semiology" to investigate the essence and function of symbols in society. This discipline would fall under the domain of social psychology and, consequently, general psychology. According to him, signs consist of two components: a sound or image, also known as a signifier, and a concept, also known as a signified. The relationship between the signifier and signified is not natural but rather conventional (Baskin, 2011: 16). Charles Sanders Peirce named this theory of sign and sign-use "semiotics," a term that has gained widespread usage and whose fundamental principle of the trichotomy of icon/index/symbol relationship also emphasizes subjectivity in individuals' interpretation of these signs (Thornbury, 2011: 51). Broadly speaking, Peirce and De Saussure's works suggest that human culture consists of signs, each symbolizing something beyond itself, and individuals within the culture engage in making and interpreting these signs. The essence of semiotics, therefore, is to identify the elements involved in the creation and interpretation of signs, to develop the necessary conceptual tools to better understand this process within different cultural contexts. However, over the past twenty years, semiotics has broadened its focus to include a wider variety of topics beyond its original emphasis. In “A Theory of Semiotics”, Umberto Eco (1979) defines semiotics as the study of anything that can be interpreted as a sign. A sign, in this context, refers to any object or concept that can be seen as a meaningful substitute for something else. He further argues that this 'something else' does not necessarily exist at the same time as the sign itself, but rather replaces it even in its absence (Yakin et al., 2014: 5).

From this perspective, this research probes into DeLillo’s use of brand marks, foreign signs, and languages as signifiers for the characters forging their identity in opposition to otherness. DeLillo himself recognizes the significance of the sound-image signs generated by the overall restlessness around him when crafting

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his fiction. He confesses in an interview that he meticulously observes and attentively listens to his surroundings, deciphering its intricate codes and messages, and converting these disorderly and overwhelming sounds and signs into a coherent aesthetic form. He captures the ambient noises and signs, including brand names, radio conversations, television dialogue and advertisements and infuses them with human emotions and empathy (DeLillo, 1993: 12). Although several modernist writers have long attributed to signs and sounds the ability to convey the experience of postmodernity, DeLillo takes this notion to an uncanny and almost mystical level. In a 1993 interview with Adam Begley, DeLillo admitted that certain words and phrases often carry a unique and captivating quality. They are initially generated for brand products, but crafted to be easily pronounced in various languages. When these words are separated from their original purpose, they become "something nearly mystical" (DeLillo, 1993: 12).

2.2. Spatiality: Suburban/Urban Dichotomy

Another aspect of the study examines the influence of geographical spatiality on the American collective imagination and its perception of race and focuses on how DeLillo uses spatial representations to depict the American mentality and national identity and that through the juxtaposition of suburban and urban environments. Keith, M., and Pile, S. have already suggested that the individual's existence, whether social or psychological, is dominated by environment more than anything else (Keith and Pile, 1993: 2), and in the same vein, the two novels seem to attribute to the geographical locations social and metaphorical significances with the power to impact on racial and cultural dynamics. The correlation between social identities and specific areas illustrates the significant impact of spatiality on every aspect of the American society, be it cultural or political (Keith and Pile, 1993: 3). In this respect, "White Noise" examines the social, economic, and ethical dilemmas resulting from unregulated immigration, addressing questions of citizenship and national identity in private and public contexts. While "Mao II" primarily focusses on governmental strategies aimed at containing Communism and the resulting global tensions, particularly the Cold War and global terrorism. The publication of the two novels coincided also with significant national issues like immigration, racism, Cold War, and terrorism, and DeLillo posits at the heart of all these challenges the question of citizenship and national identity. While domestic and foreign contexts may differ, both exhibit the persistent presence of essentialist racism and pejorative stereotypes from the perspective of privileged white individuals.

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3. The Symbolic of Signs in "White Noise"

Though seemingly inoffensive, foreign signs, very often in the form of acronyms and advertisements, seem to overwhelm the characters' everyday lives, challenging their dream of a cultural and racial homogeneity. All along the narrative, the white characters display a real uneasiness with foreign languages and signs, and perceive them as a potential threat and a source of acoustic pollution. In his book, "Subjectivity and Identity: Between Modernity and Postmodernity" (2015), Peter V. Zima's argues that postmodern media-saturated middle-class Americans resent the presence of foreign languages because they threaten their own subjectivity; another language often runs parallel to the existence of otherness and so different cultures (Zima, 2015: 215). Generally, the reaction to this difference is one of fear and rejection, which takes the form of an unconscious desire to take refuge in one's culture or language. It is known that language possesses that social and affective dimension which very often serves as a refuge from exterior threats and a manner for individuals to preserve themselves from anything that does not correspond to their own identity. This could potentially clarify why in the narrative, these unintelligible foreign words and signs, untranslatable into English, are perceived as genuine threats associated to hidden conspiracies. Perhaps, it is their unintelligibility that assimilates these foreign signs to the conspiracy theory since both are impenetrable and mysterious so beyond comprehension and control (Vanheule, 2016: 3).

In this context, the novel explores the significant connection between consumerism and foreign languages, signs, and brands. This association is, in reality, imaginary and at times fabricated, but nevertheless implies that foreigners are partly responsible for several social problems, validating racism, xenophobia, and perpetuating racial stereotypes. Actually, one aspect of the novel examines how hypermedia saturation intersects with race and identity and the manner in which the constant stream of media contributes to shaping biased perceptions of race and racial stereotypes. Several scenes in the novel showcase white characters' xenophobic reactions to foreigners and their languages, revealing a general attitude towards race and a latent racism. Actually, one of the historical paradoxes of American society is the conflict between its declared affiliation with occidental white culture and its ideals of racial and cultural diversity. In fact, the very particular way the novel uses foreign signs constitutes an ingenious semiotic manipulation at the level of both content and form. Whether Japanese, German, or Oriental, these signs and names have the same function in the narrative. They represent an obscure, untranslatable, and disturbing alien presence, making them all the more distressing. The moment Jack left the privileged environment of College-on-the-Hill into Iron City heading to Minsk apartment, he is instantly

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overwhelmed by another realty that makes him “aware of processes, components, things relating to other things … [and] saw things new” (DeLillo, 1985: 305). One of these things that immediately captivated his attention and even disturbed him is the foreignness of inscriptions in the heart of America, “NU MISH BOOT ZUP KO. Gibberish but high-quality gibberish.” (DeLillo, 1985: 305).

Even if many white individuals, like Jack, would not admit it, the foreign signs, whatever their origins and sound patterns, provoke a reflexive repulsion. They immediately activate a sort of self-defense reaction to preserve the space, which, in the name of their color and identity, grants them with so many privileges. This psychological reaction is expressed through various nationalistic attitudes ranging from chauvinism, political populism, xenophobia, and racism. In his essay Antonio, R.J. (2000), “After Postmodernism: Reactionary Tribalism”, clearly associates what he labels as “New Tribalism” with xenophobia. Furthermore, globalization, deregulation, and the end of the Cold War, with its geopolitical conflicts, have led to the emergence of new drives for asserting and preserving national and cultural identities. The rise of this "new tribalism" is not simply a product of but also an active participant of the fragmented nature of postmodern society especially in its manifestations of cultural disintegration, rejection of universal values, and emphasis on political identities. The emergence of anti-immigration militancy, the rejection of cultural conformity, and the preservation of cultural homogeneity are, in fact, the paradoxical outcomes of capitalist globalization that wants to dissolve all identities into one community of consumers (Antonio, 2000: 55-7).

What is significant here is that the reality prompts the American white community to consider that their culture is not the homogeneous, monolithic, middle class, male, white, western as they have assumed. The truth that makes reality so disorienting for them is the fact that the so called “colored” races are challenging more and more their marginalized condition by imposing their presence at every sphere of the society, forcing a shift from centralized sameness to a more decentralized diversity (Shirvani,1994: 292). Indeed, the presence of foreign signs and different races seems to summon middle-class white citizens for self-examination and deeper cultural introspection. This is very skillfully sketched in Jack’s reaction to his daughter’s sleep delirium with foreign words, as he commented

The utterance was beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder. It was like the name of an ancient power in the sky, tablet-carved in cuneiform. It made me feel that something hovered. But how could this be? A simple brand name, an ordinary car. How could these near nonsense words, murmured in a

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child's restless sleep, make me sense a meaning, a presence? She was only repeating some TV voice. Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida. Supranational names, computer-generated, more or less universally pronounceable. Part of every child's brain noise, the substatic regions too deep to probe. Whatever its source, the utterance struck me with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence. (DeLillo, 1985: 155)

DeLillo is not the only one who overinterprets these trends of marks, acronyms, and abbreviations and associates them with delirium. Several other postmodern American writers have employed this motif to illustrate the impact of a globalizing world on individuals and communities. The delirium motif is intended here to reflect the characters' sense of loss and disorientation in a world deregulated by global economic globalization. Citing Leo Spitzer's article "The Individual Factor in Linguistic Innovations", Apter argues that "brand names and trademark logos in the novel as linguistic innovations, referring to product labels like Sunkist or Kodak that become new nouns" (Apter, 2006: 378). Perhaps this how Jack's overinterpretation of these brands and trademarks should be understood; while initially inoffensive they are lived by the characters as a form of colonialism. In a revealing passage, Jack, overwhelmed by the surrounding noise, laments, that his environment is contaminated by incessant mechanical noises from cards, loudspeakers, foreign words, and other machines culminating in a "unlocatable roar, as of some form of swarming life just outside the range of human apprehension" (DeLillo, 1985: 22). All the surrounding sounds like a toxic storm of media messages, and blends into the background noise.

All these scenes are very revealing to the deep concerns of the novel with the semiotic significance that pervade society. There is a process through which foreign language is assimilated into another culture in a manner that is not related to its original meaning but rather to its exotic and mysterious connotation. This is the reason why industrials and trade corporations use entirely foreign brand names to their products. This dual-itemization of products suggests that the American consumer attribute the same mystical dimension to the place where the product was purchased; that is the marketplace (Alworth, 2010: 314). In the novel the town's marketplaces and malls are overloaded with foreign brands and exotic signs and their constant recurrence by mass media seems at times to overwhelm the characters daily life. In addition to this sound pollution, the foreignness of these signs and names interferes with the characters' capacity to attach a value to products based on their intrinsic qualities. A situation that generates a sort of paradoxical relationship between the manner postmodern people attach identities to products they consume and how they perceive their own identity in opposition

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with those same items. Despite their appeals, these foreign signs represent the intrusion of alien and exotic elements into the characters' day life even in regions that were once safe from foreign presence, resulting into a feeling of disorientation and the urgency to struggle to defend their authentic identity.

In her article "Oneworldedness: Or Paranoia as a World System" (2006), Apter, E. argues that almost unconsciously, these micro-minority sounds and signs signify to many Americans the expression of a rampant transnationalism and weird globalization which consider the planet as an extended marketplace and blur any territorial sovereignty and thereof endangering its identity (Apter, 2006: 383). This feeling is at the origin a general sense of paranoid subjectivity with its symptomatic expression of persecution fantasy, catastrophism, and xenophobia. In the novel, the sense of catastrophism and foreign presence merge together to express the undefined danger and the urgency of many situations. As Jack observes at the moment schools start to be evacuated that the danger may not only come from technological devices alone like "the asbestos fireproofing, the adhesive on shipping containers, the fumes from the chlorinated pool…" but also from "something deeper, finer-grained, more closely woven into the basic state of things" (DeLillo, 1985: 35).

This fear from the exotic and difference is further developed in a conversation with Jack and son Heinrich about a convicted serial killer whom his son had befriended through a distant game of chess, Heinrich explains that the killer had only shot "Some people in Iron City" who were "Total strangers …[and] he "had been hearing voices on TV … Talking just to him … Singling him out … Telling him to down in history. He was twenty-seven, out of work, divorced, with his car up on blocks. Time was running out on him" (DeLillo, 1985: 44). The conversation strongly echoes a scene in another killer's novel, "Underworld" (1997), in which a sniper, responding to "voices" from TV, shoots randomly at strangers in the street (DeLillo, 1997: 216). It also reminds the fictional version of Harvey Oswald, who assassinated President Kennedy in "Libra". Despite the gravity of the event, it is nonetheless absorbed with fantastical foreign-made conspiracies by manipulating mass media and other official discourses. Of course, this is intended because confusion blurs the line between fictional suppositions and historical facts, strongly affecting the public's perception of reality. In all these instances, DeLillo is clearly denouncing media disinformation and its misleading manipulation that impacts the individual's perception of his own identity and the rest of the world.

3.2. Suburban Spaces in White Noise

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Another key aspect of the novel examines how the environment affects race and identity. There is a clear opposition between, on the one hand, urban spaces with their cultural and racial heterogeneity, and, on the other hand, suburban and smalltown spaces and their tendencies to cultural and racial homogeneity. However, this equation extends beyond the American context, and according to Buell, J. (1998), hyper-development and the global economy facilitate the integration of minority groups and communities from various backgrounds into the society because economic globalization promotes a universal global consumer culture and identity, leading to a sort of "heterogenous transnational public sphere" (Buell, 1998: 449-50). The depiction of Iron City in “White Noise” effectively illustrates this concept as it captures the bleak and enigmatic essence of post-industrial metropolitan America and evoking images of impoverished working-class conditions. DeLillo does not even provide specific details about the residents or their backgrounds; the narrative simply suggests that they are "total foreigners". The mass media and the Blacksmith community appear disinterested in their very existence, deeming them insignificant and socially invisible. The setting provides a sharp contrast to the suburban and intellectual atmosphere of College-on-the-Hill, which stands for the white upper middle-class community, the setting of the major parts of the plot, and where Jack spends most of his time. When Jack describes where his ex-wife's and Heinrich's mother, lives, in fact, he is projecting his stereotyped version of all the locations similar to Iron City inhabited by foreigners, akin to distant lands with unamerican customs and lifestyles. According to him in changing her location, she changed her identity and became known as Mother Devi, and lives in an ashram on the outskirts of a steel industry town previously known as Tubb in Montana, now “Dharamsalapur”. According to Jack, there are rumors about various scandals in that place whose name is obviously foreign, such as sexual exploitation, drug use, public nudity, manipulation of the psyche, lack of cleanliness, illegal tax practices, worship of primates, torture, and prolonged and horrible deaths (DeLillo, 1985: 24). However, the bluntest expressions of xenophobia—very close indeed to a sort of mild racism—come from Jack’s reaction to his son's friend Orest Mercator. Jack immediately fixes his attention on the boy's visibly non-white skin color, "of uncertain pigmentation" (DeLillo,1985: 206), and reflexively attempts to identify the boy's origin, as he reflected “What kind of name is Orest? … He might have been Hispanic, Middle Eastern, Central Asian, a dark-skinned Eastern European, a light-skinned black. Did he have an accent? I wasn't sure. Was he a Samoan, a native North American, a Sephardic Jew? It was getting hard to know what you couldn't say to people" (DeLillo, 1985: 208). It is not clear to whom this remark is addressed, but we can imagine an undefined white listener, and this is very

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symbolic of the white man's frustration and sense of loss in the uncontrolled flux of immigration, who may come from anywhere. This situation challenges the tradition of black/white racial categorization and seems to generate a sort of confusion among the white population when confronted with undefined foreign presence.

In this and other scenes, Jack demonstrates a systematic acute awareness of race. For example, when he encounters a family of Jehovah's Witnesses, he immediately perceives them based on their color, as evidenced by his statement, "We were next to a family of black Jehovah's Witnesses" (DeLillo, 1985: 132). However, Jack never identifies himself, his family, or any of the white people he encounters as belonging to a distinct racial category, leaving racial categorization to the non-white others. Frankenberg, R. (1993) argues that "whites are the non-defined definers of other people" (Frankenberg, 1993: 197). Even though ordinary white people like Jack do not consider themselves racists, or at least are not aware of it, they share a common tendency to identify others in racial terms, thereby engaging in consciously or unconsciously racist thought patterns.

Similarly, in an attempt to avoid discussing 'Dylar" drug, Babette redirects the conversation to a completely unrelated topic about a black girl who is quite insignificant for the plot, and rapidly the conversation turns out to be about Africa. The scene shows, through Steffie's and her mother's reflections, the total confusion and ignorance of the reality of other places and societies. Steffie's responses typify a general confusion that equates unfamiliar and familiar concepts, such as the camel and automobiles, and reveal that most Americans' knowledge is primarily based on the frequently biased portrayals of Hollywood and mass media. The irony is that both are alien to the American landscape; even the known automobile is an imported foreign object. The scene, though apparently inconsequential in the narrative as a whole, is an oblique reference to a colonial past in the sense that colonialism allows a society to enjoy other people's products without great efforts or even knowledge about their origins or the ways they have come to them. Murray expresses his great admiration for the supermarket's diverse selection of global flavors and feels, " like being at some crossroads of the ancient world—a Persian bazaar or boom town on the Tigris" (DeLillo, 1985: 169).

Although the presence of individuals of different races or ethnic origins in predominantly white suburban areas, such as Blacksmith in the novel, is barely noticeable, individuals like Jack Gladney, who live in largely isolated white communities, often feel uncomfortable when they encounter some of them. Even though their presence in the society has never challenged the supposed universality of middle-class white values, people still perceive them as a dangerous invasion, exaggerating their number (Engles, 1999: 755). DeLillo's

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portrayal of Jack Gladney's introspective search for identity suggests that white individuals prefer to perceive themselves as independent individuals, while they perceive those from racialized minorities as typical representatives of their racial groups. In the novel, there is a dialogic relationship between identity formation and otherness, in which the perception of one's identity necessarily relies on categorizing others. Thus, the white man does perceive himself in racial terms and sees himself as an individual; however, as Tim Engles (1999) has observed, their desire for individuality does not necessarily mean that they have no group affinities (Engles,1999: 760–1). In fact, the perception of their own identity still rests on the opposition between their whiteness and the non-whiteness of otherness. White individuals perceive themselves as individuals first, and their whiteness is secondary, if noticed at all, and often "atomized into invisibility." Their essential identity is based on their own self-identification as independent entities, whereas the "non-white" or "colored," such as Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and even Natives, are racialized and perceived as homogeneous representatives of their race or ethnicity, never as individuals ((Engles, 1999: 145).

In the opening scene of the first chapter, while watching the students and their parents in the station wagons from his office window, Jack clearly stated his belonging to the upper middle-class white community. He felt a sort of bond with that “collection of the like-minded and the spiritually akin, a people, a nation" (DeLillo, 1985: 4). This confession has two meanings: the first is that he considers himself to belong to a social class, and the second is that he is aware of his belonging to a distinct identity, a color, and a race. He realized at one point of the story that "the world is full of abandoned meanings" (DeLillo, 1985:184), and certainly among these things are the old views on race, ethnicity, and nationality. The truth is that the constant mass media bombardment with stereotypical images and false information about otherness maintains this floating impression, reinforcing the old racial prejudices. However, heavy immigration, reshaping America's demography and steadily eroding white privileges, challenges these assumptions in DeLillo's novel.

The depiction of Blacksmith as an environment where postmodern conditions converge with race and identity is perhaps one of the novel's most significant aspects. In this context, while not really set in a roaring metropolis, “White Noise” still engages with themes of urbanity and its devastating consequences for the human psyche. It ostensibly offers a poignant critique of the human condition of its time, as well as the intricate relationship between consumerism, media saturation, and the ever-present threats of annihilation. The airborne toxic event stands out as the most prominent representation of this reality; however, the characters' response to the event seems to have been shaped by their exposure to

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technology and mass media resulting in a secondhand relationship with reality. According to Veggian H. (2015), the postmodern and postindustrial condition generates bewildering experiences with the reality in which the natural and the artificial, the authentic and the simulated intersect in various and complex ways (Veggian, 2015: 55). As a result, the focus is not solely on the physical aspects of the spatial environments but rather on their disorienting impacts on the characters' psyche and behavior.

Blacksmith, with its academic institutions, shopping centers, and permanent technological and media nuisances, functions as a microcosm that stands for postmodern life at large. In his essay "Supermarket Sociology" (2010), Alworth, D. J., asserts that the shopping centers and the hypermarkets become the metaphor for the postmodern disorienting hyperreality and its effect on the characters' lives and even on their own identity (Alworth, 2010: 301). Only the shopping centers seem to offer an alternative to this sense of loss, in which the characters have the impression of forming a community of consumers. Even more, these spaces seem to play an important role in shaping the nature of their social identity, such as race, class, gender, and family relationships. Alworth also contends that the supermarket functions as a cohesive social entity, with products playing different roles based on their packaging, pricing, and labeling. Within the supermarket, the human subject is not just one of the various entities that make up the network, but he himself is also shaped by the surroundings including "bewildering array of devices" (Alworth, 2010: 304) with their incessant and flashing sounds, everywhere and on every shelf.

In a scene, Jack and his family find themselves caught in a shopping frenzy. Nearing delirium, Jack guides his family members like a crew on an expedition, and "shopped with reckless abandon … traded money for goods … The more money [he] spent, the less important it seemed... [he] was the benefactor, the one who dispenses gifts, bonuses, bribes, baksheesh" (DeLillo,1985: 83). A strange feeling submerges Jack as he retrieves a lost narrative about his social status and identity as a dominant white male individual, confessing that he "began to grow in value and self-regard... filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I'd forgotten existed... I felt expansive" (DeLillo, 1985: 84). This scene echoes a character's observation in DeLillo's first novel, Americana (1971), "To consume in America is not to buy; it is to dream" (DeLillo, 1971: 270). Seen from this perspective, the value of the consumed commodity does not lie in its prices and quality or even its origin, but in what it reflects as social values such as the rights, identity, and status of those who consume those commodities. However, people speaking "Hindi, Vietnamese, or related tongues" (DeLillo, 1985: 82) immediately compromise the vision. As he is leaving the supermarket with his

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wife Babette, and Murray, Jack is surprised to see that most of the people at the cash terminal in the supermarket, despite being American-born, do not address each other in English, and grows more and more irritated by the increasing number of languages he hears, but cannot identify and much less understand (DeLillo, 1985: 40).

Jack's observation, though seemingly mundane, is very racially biased and stereotyped, and is very symptomatic of the latent racial prejudices and misconceptions so ingrained in everyday American life. The foreign presence, though Jack would never state it overtly, is never appreciated especially in what is supposed to be a space exclusive to privileged white consumers, and all this foreignness around is in fact an important part his existential anxieties. As the representative of the white middle class of Americans, he illustrates the conception of themselves as autonomous individuals detaining exclusively the authentic American identity, excluding by this the other non-whites from the privileges afforded to them by their race. The other racialized groups and communities that live under a dominant white population and culture are expected to complete subordination to what is considered to be the normality, including language use and way of life. However, the foreign presence and the fact that most of the products they consume are from alien brands seriously undermine these expectations. This is one of the many paradoxes that define American postmodern consumer society behind the general feeling of disorientation and a lingering impression of some sort of alien invasion and commercial colonization (Buell, 1998: 562).

While discussing Linda Hutcheon's article "A Poetics of Postmodernism" (1988), Shirvani (1994) agrees with what DeLillo presaged in "White Noise", and while not explicitly stated, he seems to suggest that the white people have fled from the city to the suburb out of their repulsion from heterogeneity and preference to a homogenized "authentic" occidental culture (Shirvani, 1994: 292). The whole tragedy of Jack Gladney, the representative of the white middle-class Americans, is that this homogeneity even in suburban areas seems to be seriously compromised. The very name of the town, Blacksmith, supposed to be a white bastion evokes the very futility of the attempt. Blacksmith includes the adjective black and also an anonymous black Mr. Smith contrasting with the white's vision of the place. While driving deep into the Blacksmith countryside around Farmington, the narrative offers a scene akin to Thomas Jefferson's pastoral garden with its "meadows and apple orchards... [and] white fences" (DeLillo, 1985: 12). The whiteness of the place implies also the color of the identity of its dwellers, and Murray lives the scene as a collective "religious experience," recalling "the thousands who were here in the past" (DeLillo, 1985: 12). However,

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this epiphany moment reveals Murray's hidden frustration, and, as a Jew who believes in the pastoral dream, his vision evokes Philp Roth's main protagonist's disillusionment with the same vision in “American Pastoral: A Fantasy of the American Dream of Assimilation” (1997). This illusion of insularity provides him with a feeling of safety even in front of the terrible destiny of death and feels relieved from the anxieties of anonymity and the racial confusions so characteristic to the cosmopolitan environment (DeLillo, 1985: 38). However, this spiritual reunion with the past and security are seriously endangered by the black cloud of Nyodene D; its color is black spreading death over a white bastion suggesting that the colored immigration is prosecuting a white population exodus (Jacobson, 2018: 3). Therefore, homogeneity can never be achieved what is left is to make acceptable for the white man’s eyes.

Perhaps, this precarious tolerance is white man’ s tacit compensation of a shameful past. There are several scenes in the two novels where DeLillo more fully evokes that the pains related to the presence of the racialized other is more tolerable than their repressed presence buried deep within the white psyche. The fact is that the so-called white supremacy and belittling the other races is the result of the colonial white ruthless exploitation of those races and its subsequent discourse for decades. Therefore, the white cultural identity formation has assimilated the repression of these ugly facts because the past would reveal what Joseph Conrad labelled as “Heart of Darkness” at the heart the white culture. Effectively, there a sort of a white denial and a repulsion to assume the past when Jack undertakes to clean the family garbage asserts that he " picked through it item by item, mass by shapeless mass, wondering why I felt guilty, a violator of privacy, uncovering intimate and perhaps shameful secrets" (DeLillo, 1985: 259). The story does not clearly reveal what are these shameful secrets, but in another scene in the novel where Jack finds himself in white cemetery and hears nothing suggesting a total severance his racial history and felt relieved that Blacksmith that is "not smack in the path of history and its contaminations” (DeLillo, 1985: 85). The fact that the dead can no longer talk to him and to transmit to him their historical and cultural legacies would probably constitute a tragedy, but it ends with a total satisfaction because he has not to assume the historical consequences of the creation his own race such as colonialism, subjugation and genocides (Mikics, 2004: 201). DeLillo seems to suggest that this is not exclusive to Jack, but many white individuals will likely experience a similar feeling when confronted with those embarrassing truths of their history. Therefore, severed from the fundamentally truths of their racial history that seems to have gone beyond recovery, they are left with an undefined sense of populist patriotism

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leading to the ironic need to define their own identity only in opposition to the racial other (Buell, 1998: 548).

4. "Mao II": Race and Spatiality

4.1. Orient/Occident Dichotomy

Unlike "White Noise", "Mao II" approach to race and identity is less ambiguous but similarly weaved into broader political and cultural concerns. The novel focuses primarily on the relationship between art, individual freedom, and terrorism, but it nevertheless obliquely addresses race through the stereotyped connection between some characters' roles in international terrorism and their ethnic and religious origins. Though not overtly racist, the narrative representation of the Arab characters is systematically associated with either poverty and mendicity or religious extremism and political terrorism (Begley,1997: 496-7). The collapse of the Soviet Union appears to have significantly influenced leftist ideologies and its universalist ambitions, making them somewhat inoffensive. However, the religious element persists, posing both security and civilizational challenges to the western world. DeLillo asserts in "Mao II" that the "future belongs to crowds" (DeLillo,1991: 28), a concept that bears a striking resemblance to Samuel Huntington's concerns in his article "The Clash of Civilizations" (1993) about the dangers of the growing number of non-occidental populations in the world.

Although the novel focuses on the portrayal of a particular ethnic and cultural group, it nevertheless offers a different yet equally complex exploration of race compared to "White Noise". Indeed, the novel's publication in 1991 coincided with the Gulf War, a time when mass media and official discourse initiated a campaign of denigration, linking the Arab world to major geopolitical conflicts (Spencer, 2002: 12). One aspect of the novel actually reflects the dynamic put at work at that time to amplify an already existing connection between the Arabs and security issues in the public mind. "In American Evangelical Islamophobia: A History of Continuity with a Hope for Change" (2016), Johnston, D. L., explains very well the religious, historical, and political dynamics that revived islamophobia in the nineties (Johnston, 2016: 228). Although there are some similarities between DeLillo's treatment of the two novels, such as the constant consideration of otherness as a potential threat, there is a significant shift in "Mao II"'s approach to the subject. While "White Noise" subtly incorporates race and identity into domestic existential concerns, "Mao II" portrays the subject as influenced by international diplomatic and external security issues. Therefore, the

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two novels seem to be complementary in their treatment of diversity and difference; one sees the issues from the inside and the other from the outside. In a way, “White Noise” explores the subject in relation to people’s everyday lives, whereas “Mao II” situates it within diplomatic affairs, both within a world tending towards irreversible globalization.

Typical to DeLillo's fiction, the majority of racialized characters lack individuality and seem to be stereotyped representations of their race, rather than fully formed characters with personal histories or identities. The novel frequently relegates them to backdrop roles for other themes, yet their portrayal serves as a symptom of how media-fabricated stereotyped images of otherness can impact the American collective imagination. In her article "How the Dead Speak to the Living" (2002), Laura Barrett warns against the dangers of mass media associating race and culture with geopolitical conflicts, particularly in the context of hypermediated and fragmented societies. In fact, the narrative occasionally mirrors the main stream media and some orientalists’ portrayals of some ethnic and racial groups, often of non-Western or non-white origins, such as Arabs. This is evident in Bill's assessment of the "terrorist" figure as unassimilable in any human society, and is clearly identified as the Arab Muslim (DeLillo, 1991: 146). As Edward Said explains in “Orientalism” (1978), these fabricated representations very often blur the lines between fantasy and reality, contributing to a subjective, often negative stereotyping that overlooks the complexities of different cultures and races without any connection with the reality (Said, 1978: 101-2). Perhaps it is DeLillo’s manner to challenge the reader to consider the racial construct in American society and the occidental world at large.

Whether intentionally or not, there are scenes in the novel that portray the Arab characters in a racialized, twisted, and unreal manner, recalling stereotyped images from old conflictual tensions between the Orient and the Occident. Historically, the representation of Middle Easterners in the American imagination and the Occident in general is much older than the Cold War tensions. It seems to have been shaped by the historical conflictual oppositions between Islam and Christianity during the crusade wars, then between the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Europe, and finally between Occident and Orient during the European colonialism of the Middle East and Africa (Johnston, 2016: 226-7). At one point in the narrative, the description of the young boys around Abu Rashid, who embodies the terrorist figure of excellence in the Western mind, reflects all the stereotypes about the Arabo-Muslim world in the Western imagination. The boys have no individual features, “no face or speech” (DeLillo, 1991: 206); stripped from the innocence of their young age, they become the perfect clones of the terrorist figures. Awan, M. S., deplores in his article "Global Terror and the Rise

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of Xenophobia/Islamophobia" (2010) the thorough manipulation and multiplied stereotypical representation of Islam and the Arab world at that time. He argues that the underlying reality of most Western mass media and fiction works portray the Muslim and Arab world as a constant threat to the Western world (Awan, 2010: 533).

Therefore, past and present history is crucial for understanding the novel's framing of the Arab world, and may explain the contexts that led to nowadays identity rejection and individual freedom erosion under the cover of political and security necessities. While these touches on race and ethnicity within the novel do not appear as primary themes, they are extremely informative on the past and present representations of race and identity in American culture. In this sense, the examination of the key Arab characters in "Mao II" and their roles in the narrative is very significant to the manner in which DeLillo probes into the complex subject of racial representation in America. A perception that would be exported to much of the Western world with a particular focus on Arab characters and the image of the Arab world (Veggian, 2015: 68). In the novel, there is a passage that works out the image of the Arab world inherited from a conflictual past that Hollywood and other mass media have maintained in the American imagination. As she travels to meet the iconic terrorist leader Abu Rachid in the novel, Brita describes Beirut as a place full violence and death with pictures of bare-chested men carrying large guns and grenades, as well as boys with tattoos of human skulls and automatic rifles at the checkpoints (DeLillo,1991: 202). The scene offers a static, almost frozen picture of the place and its inhabitants, their portrayal emanates from familiar stereotypes about Arabs and the Middle East, reinforcing the stereotypical image of Arabs as enigmatic, otherworldly, and often associated with terrorism and anti-American ideologies. In this sense, the Arab characters are little more than background characters; they play significant roles that influence the development of the main theme—terrorism—in the story, and its hostility to American democracy and way of life. According to the narrative and on the mouth of Abu Rachid, animosity towards the Western world dominates its inhabitants. He argues that the Western presence is lived a menace to local people's dignity and identity, and "Terror" emerges as the sole effective response to this threat. It is the unique way to assert one's existence in this world. He goes on to say that terror now has the power to achieve what hard work once could. Terrorism makes each individual unique, and his existence with greater significance than ever before as he actively participates in changing the course of history at every moment. "We do history in the morning and change it after lunch," he says (DeLillo, 1991: 207).

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Once more the novel is at the frontier of the Clash of Civilization narrative, as the Arabo-Muslim world and the Middle East in general are associated to geopolitical and civilizational antagonism. This association resonates with the geopolitical context of the time, perpetuating the simplistic and uniform perception of a whole region with its diverse cultures and ethnicities. DeLillo is in fact connecting contemporary societal anxieties with the issues of race and ethnicity, validating already existing stereotypes in the American collective imagination, particularly in the wake of the Gulf War. The novel further complicates this image by infusing the historical antagonism with a hostile leftist ideology. Abu Rashid confesses to Brita sympathy with Chinese communism adopting Mao's discourse on human existence that glorifies armed resistance against capitalistic imperialism as the paramount manifestation of human awareness. In this discourse, death is an honorable sacrifice when it is for the people and the nation, showing contempt for the selfishness of those who die serving their own exploiters (DeLillo, 1991: 207). The novel shows that the ingrained reflex of racializing non-white people from a colonial past and identify them as potentially threatening individuals is still an actuality in the individual and collective mind.

4.2. Spatiality in “Mao II”

In fact, “White Noise” has already subtly hinted at this civilizational opposition on several occasions. One of them is when the radio prompts the Blacksmith residents to evacuate the town, directing the residents of the westside of the town to go west to the abandoned Boy Scout camp, where the Red Cross will provide them with assistance. Meanwhile, eastside residents should proceed east to the Chinese Kung Fu Palace restaurant, where they can enjoy "pagodas, lilies, ponds, and live deer" (DeLillo, 1985: 119). The town’s population division clearly has racial and cultural connotations. The Westerners destination is America and its occidental cultural symbols, represented by the Red Cross and Boy Scouts, while the Easterners destination is the exotic and alien East, representing the racialized Orient. In fact, in “White Noise”, despite being geographically distant, the Orient still haunts the American collective imagination, and the characters from middle eastern or oriental origins are stereotyped as different and dangerous. At certain moments in the story, Jack admits his uneasiness about the ethnic origin of the man, an Iranian, who delivers the newspapers every morning in his Japanese car, parked headlights in front of his house. (DeLillo, 1985: 184). Just like in “Mao II”, the portrayal of Middle Easterners is racialized, and their mere presence causes anxiety and undefined threats. Perhaps Jack's discomfort stems from real events of the time related to the "Iranian Hostage Crisis," which captivated

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America's public attention and the media's focus (Hausman, 2021: 46). What complicated Jack's fears is that not only the driver is of suspicious ethnic origin, but also the car he drives is noticeably foreign, "a Nissan Sentra." At that time, the American media primarily focused on the high rate of Japanese car sales in the country, viewing them as a potential threat to the traditionally American automobile industry, reviving the memory that the Japanese too were enemies at given moments of the American history, and is somehow kept in the collective memory as a potential oriental threat (Dickerson, 2012: 9). Although Jack refuses to acknowledge, even to himself, that his anxieties stem from racial issues, his discomfort with all things foreign is a symptom of uncontrolled xenophobia and potential racism.

However, what is noticeably different in "Mao II" is that there are moments where DeLillo seems to subvert these racial and cultural prejudices, offering more nuanced views on the subject. As it appears, the experience of white Americans with globalized urban spaces such as Beirut made them aware that globalization is much more dangerous, not only to their identity but to that of all communities (Begley, 1997: 497). In a way, DeLillo, like his characters in the novel, seems to have become conscious of the limitations of the old domestic views on race by providing depth and complexity to non-white characters. According to Apter, E. (2006) the conspiratorial logic envisions globalization as a worldwide system at the service of powerful and obscure entities. This system aims to reduce the multi-polar world into a single universal system under a single superstate, thereby collapsing all frontiers and simultaneously endangering all racial and cultural specificities (Apter, 2006: 366). This is precisely what DeLillo suggests in "Mao II", where the real artist Andy Warhol conflates two antithetical symbols: the communist Chinese historical figure Mao Zedong (Mao II) and the capitalist trademark Coca-Cola (Coke II). These opposing signs are not only present in the United States as symbols of consumer society where ideologies have become commodities just like any other product; the advertisement also covers Beirut's main streets. Apter observes that Coca-Cola's "intense red color establishes uncanny links to posters from the Cultural Revolution. Communism and capitalism, democracy and terrorism, totalitarianism and religion, cults and family values, these bipolar systems are assimilated into one template" (Apter, 2006: 378).

This is what may explain DeLillo's dual and ambiguous approach to race in the novel, which seems to challenge domestic preconceptions on race and identity under urban conditions. The Moonies scene, though alien to American culture, and the baseball stadium, also alien to Shiite tradition, become two sides of the

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same "world family." This is nowhere better expressed than in the dialogue between Karen and Kim on the occasion,

They stand and chant, fortified by the blood of numbers. … They're all around us, parents in the thousands, afraid of our intensity. This is what frightens them. We really believe. They bring us up to believe but when we show them true belief, they call out psychiatrists and police. We know who God is. This makes us crazy in the world. …Karen says to Kim, "This is where the Yankees play. "Baseball," she says, using the word to sum up a hundred happy abstractions, themes that flare to life in the crowd shout and diamond symmetry, in the details of a dusty slide. The word has resonance if you're American, a sense of shared heart and untranslatable lore. But she only means to suggest the democratic clamor, a history of sweat and play on sun-dazed afternoons, an openness of form that makes the game a kind of welcome to my country. (DeLillo, 1991: 21-2)

There are two key words in this passage: "baseball" and "cult." The passage uses the first as the symbol of America, the epitome of western civilization and its godless society, while the second represents an oriental and deeply religious community. Two antithetical notions merge into an unnatural mixture that can only exist in a globalized world. Indeed, the children of Marx and Coca-Cola eventually come to be similar to each other and, more importantly, uncover some sort of brotherhood. Therefore, the distinction between the domestic and the foreign comes to an exclusive construct of the Western imagination. Nevertheless, it's unclear whether Karen's and Kim's conversion reflects a satisfaction at the realization of a global melting pot or a lament over the loss of their racial purity and identity. Their reaction to the mass wedding scene, which could be very much the reflection an anxiety about the homogenization of identity and mass production, could be interpreted as defensive xenophobia and unease about the formation of new identities within global consumer culture and the blending of different cultures and languages in hybridized or multicultural contexts. This is another paradox of postmodernity where capitalistic globalization appropriates the primary symbol of foreign ideologies, such as Marxism and Islamism, intended to replace it with its own capitalist symbols. DeLillo uses this postmodern irony to criticize capitalism's xenophobia and its assimilation of other sign systems for its own purposes.

The passage recalls "White Noise"' s exploration of the opposition between the characters' perceptions of race from suburban and urban perspectives. Unlike suburban areas, the city symbolizes cultural and racial integration, where diverse identities merge within a global identity. However, this global vision of the world

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has a paradoxical effect; on the one hand, it appears to foster racial tolerance; on the other hand, it generates a sense of frustration over the erosion of individuals' unique cultural identities, leading to cultural conflicts and political tensions. Actually, the novel depicts the city as a space where diverse races and cultures intersect, staging clashes between cultural identities, political ideologies, and worldviews. While discussing terrorism in DeLillo's "Falling Man" (2007), Däwes, B. (2010) contends that the city is very often the writer's device to connect between, on the one hand, political and diplomatic conflicts, including terrorism, and, on the other hand, racial, ethnic, and cultural frictions resulting from an almost forced promiscuity (Däwes, 2010: 512). Green, J. (1999) has also made a similar observation in his essay "Disaster Footage: Spectacles of Violence in DeLillo' s Fiction" that, "the crowd overcomes differences of age and faith and race through sheer credulity" (Green, 1999: 598). The city in the novel shows how global events affect the characters' perception their own identities and those of others. In this sense, the city serves as a catalyst for intensifying already-existing racial and cultural tensions, but it is also a space for the interaction of diverse human populations, challenging and reshaping identities and beliefs.

Conclusion

Though renowned for his predilection for existential and sociopolitical issues of postmodern times, the study has attempted to show DeLillo's profound engagement with the concept of race and identity in the American society and his ability to weave these themes into diverse narrative concerns. His subtle yet powerful portrayal of racial perception in suburban and urban settings offers insights into the changing nature of racial identity and dynamics in America from within and without. Indeed, his treatment of race intersects with other themes, such as technology, hypermedia, and individualism in a rampant globalizing world providing a more comprehensive understanding of the American society. The nuances in the portrayal of urban and suburban settings in the two novels offers rich and diverse contexts for exploring race and identity because they are not mere backgrounds but active elements that shape the complexities of the racial narratives in American context. Indeed, the Comparison between the two settings is intended to illuminate his approach to race, and explains his point of view on the changing dynamics of race, identity, and culture in the American society.
In "White Noise", the racial discourse is set against the suburban mentality as a place traditionally safe from the ethnic and racial confusions of the major

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metropolitan areas. The suburban small towns usually stand for the desire to preserve a Eurocentric authentic identity within a racial, cultural and even moral homogeneity from the racial complexities of urban cities. The characters' attitudes towards race reflect the intolerance and narrow mindedness regarding to foreign presence in the community, suggesting a sort of blindness mixed with latent prejudices very typical of a suburban milieu that is often indifferent if not hostile to racial diversity. DeLillo uses this suburban background to comment on the invisibility of race in certain social contexts and how this invisibility can perpetuate a lack of consideration or understanding of racial issues in United Sates. On the other hand, “Mao II” introduces race against a totally different setting – the city symbolically a place embodying the melting pot of cultures and races and the perception of race and identity are conditioned by much more global political variables such as global terrorism and Cold War ideologies.

As long as the American society and humanity at large continue to grapple with the issues of race and identity, DeLillo's assessment on the interplay between race and culture under various geopolitical environments and conflicting ideologies will remain relevant. His work invites the readers to consider new perspective on the nature of race and prompts the reader to look beyond the apparent and the simplistic vision of things towards more subtle ways in which race informs our understanding of the world. Just like Jake in “White Noise”, DeLillo invites them to elevate to a more inclusive notion of race. When Jack shot Mink and is relieved from the urgent need of revenge, he confesses that it is as though he sees Mink “for the first time as a person," (DeLillo, 1985: 313) and no longer the representative of his race, and is suddenly submerged with "old human muddle and quirks … compassion, remorse, mercy," (DeLillo, 1985: 313). In a way his sense of guilt has revived his humanity and though himself injured his last action is to rescue the man he has just shot, and proudly admits that he “felt virtuous, … blood-stained and stately, dragging the badly wounded man through the dark and empty street. [...] There was a spaciousness to this moment, an epic pity and compassion. [...] Having shot him, having led him to believe he'd shot himself, I felt I did honor to both of us, to all of us, by merging our fortunes, physically leading him to safety” (DeLillo, 1985: 314-5).

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