The theme of migration has been well addressed in the literature of many Caribbean writers. What interests me, however, is how Caribbean writers address the issue of migration and exile when the initial migration is from one part of the Diaspora and the ultimate destination is another part of that Diaspora, as opposed to Europe or North America. In my reading of Myriam Warner-Vieyra's Juletane, I will explore geographic displacement and the search for a "mother-land" through an examination of such notions as "home," "origins," and nation; which, inevitably, leads to a discussion on alienation, exile, identity and madness, as these are key elements in understanding the effects, and affects, of this particular migratory experience. This approach is especially beneficial because there seems to be something deeper, even tangible, attached to a physical location that appears to travel with Juletane, our protagonist for whom the novel is named, and contributes to her increasing sense of alienation and shifting identity.

The migratory experience often functions as a solution to a particular problem. Frequently it is viewed as the answer to a longing where the journey's final destination represents a type of "promised-land" (and/or "mother-land") which will "save" the character from some form of political or economic hardship. However, in many Caribbean women's writings, the migratory experience, while it may offer political or economic sanctuary, commonly acts as a response to some personal lose. It functions as a bridge to erase a rupture which has occurred and reconciles the character with her self, her history, her origins, and her home. Such a reconciliation can only, presumably, take place in the "promised-land," which is metaphorically or physically Europe, complete with the illusions of wealth and well being, or the "mother-land," which is metaphorically or physically Africa with the illusions of roots and identity. Of course, there are times when the "mother-land" becomes conflated with the "promised-land" or vice-versa.

Bella Brodzki argues, the Caribbean has an important relationship to the "triangle de traite" which is a variation on the traditional definition of the African Diaspora which consist of Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas, and instead defines the "triangle" as Africa, the West and the Metropolis, which has had significant impact on Caribbean writings:

The three points of the 'triangle de traite'--Africa, the West, and the Metropole--fixed points of reference as
sites of longing, though privileged differently in the minds and psyches of Caribbean subjects, have left their imprint on all Francophone Caribbean writing, but especially on writing by women. (64)

I, however, explore these sites not only as a longing in that they represent a desire for or, rather, a craving to possess, but also as a place of infestation and false reconciliation. Warner-Vieyra's protagonist, Juletane, leaves Guadeloupe to transverse the "triangle" in hopes of reconciling herself via her perceived "mother-land"--which manifest itself as an unspecified country in Africa. Juxtaposing the traditional triangle of the Diaspora against Brodzki's "triangle," allows us to examine the Caribbean as both a site of departure and rejection as well we destination and acceptance. This is directly related to Juletane's inability to culturally or geographically adjust and her, albeit in some cases belated, acknowledgment of her environment as a source of her alienation and, in turn, her eventual illness.

Continuing with the journey itself, Juletane sets out to correct her own rupture. However, her journey-of-initiation soon becomes a "journey-of-alienation." Juletane is engaged in a reverse Middle Passage, hoping to undo the separation that was done hundreds of years prior. This journey is a reflection of Juletane's own desires to (re)connect with Africa, to engage in Brodzki's "triangle." For Juletane, Africa functions as the mythical signifier which designates a return home, a unification with one's origins and a rebirth of the self.

The search for self/identity, a history or a mother is not unproblematic--something Juletane discovers almost immediately; for the journey back to Africa is not just a physical journey, but also a psychological one. It is on this journey that Juletane becomes disillusioned with the notion of Africa as her place of origin when she finds out, aboard ship, that Mamadou, her new husband, already has a family. Before she even reaches the shores of the "mother-land," Juletane is established as an outsider, an illegitimate daughter. She experiences what Elaine Campbell calls a "psychic jolt:" [Juletane's] psychic jolt occurs when she learns aboard ship to Africa that Mamadou already has a wife and child. She, Juletane, is to become his second wife. She defines her own role as the "intruder" in what is to become an alien country with unacceptable social customs" (136). Juletane feels as if she is "on another planet;" thus further highlighting her alien-ness in every sense of the word.

Juletane's ineffective attempts to become a primary part of Mamadou's life interrupt her undertakings to view Africa as a metaphorical or real mother, as this needs to be mediated through Mamadou. This aim is a direct result of Juletane's orphaned status:

I thought I had found in Mamadou the family I missed, so I
did not love him only as a lover a husband. I transferred to him all the filial affection which was overflowing in me as well. Once again, I felt the anguish of being an orphan. Lost, alone, in the world. I was totally confused. . . . the future I had dreamed about was being slowly transformed into a painful present . . . . I was there, absurdly alone to face them. I was the stranger . . . . (Warner-Vieyra 15)

Juletane is orphaned at the age of ten and forced to leave her birth home of Guadeloupe for France. In France we see a constant longing for a "mother" which she projects onto Africa and those things-including people-African. Consequently, Mamadou becomes her surrogate (and the gender-inversion should not be lost on one here). Thus Juletane's physical journey along the triangle reflects a common theme of dislocation: sometimes to the continent of Africa, at other times back to the Caribbean, but always with a stop in the Metropolis. The results of this pilgrimage are mirrored in the multiple ruptures Juletane suffers.

The first of which is the initial rupture created by the Middle Passage and the process of commodifying African bodies. While this rupture is important, of equal importance, is the second rupture: the break between Juletane and her native country of Guadeloupe. This rupture coincides with the death of her father, thus leaving her completely orphaned—without homeland, without parents. Brodzki argues that Juletane's orphaned status means that "she is not only psychologically and physically bereft but also that . . . she lacks a history, her access to the 'Other' in the figure of the African Mamadou constitutes both an opening up to a wider social, cultural world and a return to the motherland." (67) However, Juletane's homecoming is not entirely a positive one. Therefore we see a third rupture take place where Juletane opts out of her new community, thereby solidifying her status as not only alien, but also mad.

The isolation in which Juletane finds herself can be attributed to her inability to adapt to a new environment. Anne Elizabeth Willie argues that Juletane's efforts to find herself, her family, and her past in Mamadou and Africa are shown to be illusions that cannot withstand the constant intrusion of a reality that marks Juletane's difference as a Caribbean person in the African context." (453) Willie further comments that this displacement is the leading cause of Juletane's madness and eventual death. While it is certainly true that Juletane's arrival in Africa contributes to her psychological deterioration, her "decent" into madness starts long before her physical journey. It is, in fact, located in her rootlessness, the ruptures that she suffers early in her life makes madness her only viable survival technique—a point which I will return to momentarily.

Although Warner-Vieyra's text spends less than one-fourth of its
time in the Metropolis of Paris, this location is critical to our analysis. The metropolis serves as the site of contamination and it is only through this geographical location can we fully understand Juletane's later designation as mad, as well as her subsequent experiences in Africa. In other words, in order to understand Juletane in Africa, we must begin in France, not Guadeloupe. Thus our "triangle" is complicated by these, if I may borrow from Francoise Lionnet, "geographies of pain." Lionette describes "geographies of pain" as the "production of a specifically female literary vision . . .," where female writes address the issue of pain, visibility and identity. She further posits, Caribbean women authors write "with meticulous attention to realistic detail, and the paradoxical desire to communicate, in the most honest way possible, the radically subjective, and thus generally incommunicable, experience of pain. [Where] the characters are being denied the most elementary form of recognition and visibility . . ." (137)

Thus we can read Juletane's migration as a quest for self which ultimately fails to give her the recognition, visibility or identity she so desperately crave. Unbeknownst to Juletane, these "geographies of pain," signal a new beginning through the rejection of the myth of Africa and the Metropolis as the mother and/or promised land for post-colonial female bodies; it also makes it clear that Africa cannot function as the mythical signifier. The problem for Juletane is that she exchanges one location, France, for the fantasy of another, the unspecified African country, in an attempt to compensate for her lost. Before she encounters the physical Africa, Juletane has constructed her own fantasy of Africa as a metaphysical space which will serve as her personal sanctuary. When the fantasy of Africa does not concur with the reality, she is unable to ground herself, and becomes, even more so than her experience in Paris, experiences which she describes as being damp, dark and heavy, alienated and exiled.

Willey, borrowing (or, perhaps, taking liberties with her reading) Eduard Glissant, describes the Caribbean islands as "ships of fools," set a drift and disconnected. If we accept this reading, then Juletane's disconnectedness can be attributed to her inability to acknowledge her Caribbean self and recall that heritage; as she states, after her grandmother's death, "I was completely cut off from my island home. . ." This failure to acknowledge an origin separate from Africa is often experienced by people in the African Diaspora. Willey argues the 'Afro-Caribbean population is stuck between the lost land of Africa and the unreachable land of Europe" (451). Thus they are in a constant state of suspension, belonging neither to the country they are from (in this case Guadeloupe), nor to the country they arrive at (the unspecified African nation).

Willey and others assert that this form of permanent exile often leads to madness. I posit, however, that it is not exile that leads to Juletane's madness, but her ineffectual ability to root herself
historically or geographically. Viewing the Caribbean as "ships of fools" limits our analysis to reading the Caribbean only in the context of being Africa's or Europe's illegitimate child. Of course in Diaspora studies, it is necessary to establish the ties between African and the Caribbean, however, acknowledging such a connection in no way eliminates the possibility of examining the Caribbean as an autonomous entity. Nevertheless, if we read Juletane as one of these islands, we can see her misguided attempt to adapt Africa as her mother subsequently leads to a futile endeavor to see herself as an autonomous being. If Mamadou serves as a surrogate mother, and he does, as well as a stand-in for Africa, then Juletane's identity must be defined against and through him. Juletane states: "Awa is the mother of his children, Ndeye his partner in debauchery. How does he feel about me?" (41) This desire blinds her to the possibility of viewing Guadeloupe as home, a place of origin in its own right; it also blinds her to her own sense of self worth, entitlement and independence.

Adele King believes black women's desire to connect with Africa as a mythical mother is an exercise in vain:

The black man from the Diaspora who goes to Africa is perhaps seeking a return not only to roots but to maternal warmth, looking for a mother to replace the Guadeloupe... which seems unsatisfactory. But as... a woman, in order to mature, must settle accounts with her own mother—a mother who in these novels is absent or unsatisfactory; a mother, if equated with the mother island, who is too passive, too ill defined. For a woman that mother cannot be, metaphorically, Africa. (102)

As you can see, such a search for an identity, a history or a nation is not unproblematic. In fact, Maryse Conde cautions people from the Diaspora against viewing Africa as the mythical signifier of a lost, and therefore recoverable, past without acknowledging the geographical and cultural distance. Conde states: "While Africa has often been envisaged by Caribbeans as the 'mother' country [it is] difficult, even impossible to retie the broken threads... A Caribben's quest for identity can very well be resolved without going, especially physically, to Africa, or, if you want, the journey to Africa simply proves that Africa is not essential to Caribbean identity." (98) Therefore, Juletane's aspirations for an essential African identity, or even a universal ideal of black-ness, becomes impossible to fulfill.

Warner-Vieyra complicates the mythic quest for "mother Africa" by illustrating the possibilities of what could happen if one is not grounded (geographical as well as psychologically) in her particular cultural and social space. "Juletane tries to insert herself into an Africa context," argues Willey, "but her stated ignorance of her own colonized context makes her efforts to read Africa unfruitful. Her claim to know
nothing of the colonized context erases her Caribbean heritage. She
cannot recognize the origin of her separation from Africa, the Middle
Passage." (455) This is reflected in one of Juletane's few references to
Guadeloupe:

I forget about myself, I am lulled into sleep, I dream about streams and
waterfalls. I am back in my island, a child again, on the banks of a clear
running stream. I wade in, my weariness dissolves in the
cool water. My heart swells with happiness. This is the
first time since I have been here that I have thought about my
homeland. Usually the memories that come
back to me are of my life in France. (29)

While this is certainly true of Juletane's early experience in Africa,
she later comes to recognize this separation. She laments: "I have no
home / I am an exile, an alien / I am a wreck, drifting in the wind / I
lost all my illusions." (60) Not until Juletane acknowledges the gap that
exists between herself—the self of Guadeloupe—and Africa, can she begin
her journey toward wholeness. Further recognition comes when Ndeye, her
co-wife, refers to her as a "toubabesse." Juletane is shocked to be
called a white woman while on African soil. She states:

She was quite simply identifying me with those white wives
of colonials. She was even stripping me of my identity as a black
woman. My forefathers had paid dearly for my
right to be black, spilling blood and giving their sweat
in hopeless revolts to enrich the soil of the Americas so
that I might be born free and proud to be black. (Juletane 42-43)

While Juletane rejects the label of toubabesse, conversely, she
gladly laid claim to her western "bourgeois-up bring." (7) This initial
stance greatly limits her ability to interact with the African community,
including Mamadou, in a non-western context. Nevertheless, when Juletane
is forced to define herself, she consciously and decisively lay claim to
her Caribbean heritage. Her remarks illustrate a distinct connection to a
hybrid existence in the Caribbean, not Africa. This change in position
and knowledge can only come about through her stated experiences in
Africa. Such an epiphany, however, is short lived as she remains
completely alienated by her physical environment where she is confined to
a small, dark room (much like her existence in Paris) separated from the
rest of the family. Again, she finds herself in a perpetual state of
exile, negotiating the African world only through her bedroom window.

Betty Wilson describes Juletane's situation as being like a
"little fish who [has] lost its way—a 'nageoires'—who has lost the
establishing element which enables it to stay upright and a float in the
vast ocean of life . . . (Vii) The community reads Juletane's withdrawal
as a clear sign of (western) insanity, rather that a response to her
drowning in the vast ocean of their society. Despite all of this,
Juletane knows very well she is quite sane:

Here, they call me 'the mad woman', not very
original. What do they know about madness? What if mad
people weren't mad? What if certain types of behavior
which simple, ordinary people call madness, were just
wisdom, a reflection of the clear-sighted hypersensitivity of a pure,
upright soul plunged into a real or imaginary affective
void. To me, I am the most lucid person in the
house. (Juletane 2)

For Juletane, although engaging in some behaviors which could certainly be
classified as clinical or cultural forms of madness, the madness is not
located within her, but within the geography-the "affective void" of the
Metropolis, and in turn the "affective void" of Africa
itself. Consequently, Juletane's quest reflects her existence in the
nether world--a world that can neither be erased nor substituted by Africa
or Europe. Thus the "triangle de triate" comes not to represent a haven
or an answer to the longing our protagonist experience, it is not
salvation; instead, it represents a site of exploration.

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