



Knowledgeable Research (KR)

ISSN: 2583-6633 | CODEN: KRABAU

International Open-Access Peer-Reviewed Refereed Multidisciplinary Journal

<https://knowledgeableresearch.com>

Spl. 01, Issue 04, July, 2026

Received: 10/06/2026 | Accepted: 22/06/2026 | Published: 31/07/2026

Gender Identity, displacement and new beginning through Un Papillon dans la Cité of Gisèle Pineau

Suchandra Ghosh* (French)

Assistant Professor, Amity University Mumbai, Chandernagore, West Bengal, India

Abstract:

Contemporary Francophone Guadeloupean literature constitutes a privileged space for exploring the historical, social and cultural dynamics deriving from the colonial and postcolonial experiences. Marked by slavery, colonial domination, forced and voluntary migrations, as well as by the identity framework of the diaspora, this study insistently questions the notions of exile, belonging, and memory. In this field, Gisèle Pineau stands out for exploring the experiences of exile, identity crisis and processes of reconstruction. Gisèle Pineau's "Un papillon dans la cité" highlights characters who are often female or marginalized, confronted with social violence, racism, urban exclusion, and the loss of community ties. Identity, though weakened by exile and marginalization, can be recomposed through memory, speech, and a renewed relationship with the environment.

This research therefore aims to analyze how Un papillon dans la cité, the novel of Gisèle Pineau explores the gender identity through a little Caribbean girl Félicie, navigating the traumatic displacement, marginalization and searches for belonging maintaining cultural roots in France for a new beginning. This study also highlights the traumatic experiences of Félicie while confronting the social and cultural challenges and focuses on the emotional struggles of the girl to define her place in a very different environment from Guadeloupe to France. Furthermore, this research will explore the theme of exile and displacement-whether physical, social, or internal as the central condition of human experience in the novel named Un papillon dans la cité of Gisèle Pineau.

Keywords: Gisèle Pineau; Un papillon dans la cité; Exile; Gender Identity; Diaspora; Postcolonial Literature; Cultural Identity; Trauma; Belonging; Guadeloupean Literature.

*Corresponding Author:

Suchandra Ghosh

Email: suchandraghosh02@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION:

Contemporary Francophone Guadeloupean literature constitutes a privileged space for

exploring the historical, social and cultural dynamics deriving from the colonial and

postcolonial experiences. Caribbean postcolonial literature emerges from a historical context shaped by colonization, slavery, migration and cultural hybridity. The Caribbean regions experienced European colonial domination which profoundly influenced its languages, cultures, and social structures. After the end of formal colonial rule also the legacy of colonialism continued to shape the lives and identities of the Caribbean people. One of the most significant consequences is the movement of Caribbean populations toward the metropolitan environment, particularly in France. Migration from French Caribbean territories such as Guadeloupe, Martinique to the main country France became especially prominent during 20th century, encouraged by the political and economic policies that sought to integrate these special territories into the French nation. But this migration often produced difficult, complex, emotional and cultural consequences. Mainly the Caribbean migrants frequently found themselves navigating to two different worlds. One is the cultural heritage of their homeland and another one is the social realities of life in France. This experience of living between different cultures became a central theme in Francophone Caribbean literature where the writers explore the major

issues of belonging, identity, displacement, and memory.

Marked by the slavery, colonial domination, forced and voluntary migrations, as well as by the identity framework of the diaspora, this study insistently questions the notions of exile, belonging, and memory. In this field, Gisèle Pineau stands out for exploring the experiences of exile, identity crisis and processes of reconstruction. Her novel *Un Papillon dans la cité*, written in 1992 first time, portrays the emotional and the cultural struggles of migrant life through the eyes of a young girl named Félicie. The novel presents the psychological effects of displacement when Félicie left Guadeloupe and moved to France to live with her mother Aurélie. In Paris, she encountered loneliness, racism, and cultural alienation. At the same time, she gradually learned to adapt and to create her new identity. Pineau uses Félicie's story to discuss how migration affects women differently and how identity is shaped through memory, suffering, and resilience.

Key words

Gisèle Pineau, identity, displacement, reconstruction, post-colonialism

Research Objective

This research aims to analyze how *Un papillon dans la cité*, the Novel of Gisèle Pineau explores the gender identity through a little Caribbean girl Félicie, navigating the traumatic displacement, marginalization and searches for belonging maintaining cultural roots in France for a new beginning. This study also highlights the traumatic experiences of Félicie while confronting the social and cultural challenges and focuses on the emotional struggles of the girl to define her place in a very different environment from Guadeloupe to France. Furthermore, this research will explore the theme of exile and displacement-whether physical, social, or internal as the central condition of human experience in the novel named *Un papillon dans la Cité* of Gisèle Pineau.

Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative approach, relates to the descriptive study of Gisèle Pineau's work *Un papillon dans la Cité*. Articles, books, videos, interviews, and websites are also used to gather information and to highlight new developments in the field of research.

About the Author

Gisèle Pineau was born in Paris in 1956 to the Guadeloupean parents. Although she was

born in Paris, France, but her origins are [Guadeloupean](#) and she has written many books in a very difficult situation and her childhood as a Black person growing up in a Parisian society also troubled her a lot. Her childhood was marked by constant movement between France and Caribbean. She experienced racism and exclusion while growing up in France and these experiences influenced her literary works strongly. She mainly focused on exile, migration, women's experiences, cultural identity, racism, family memory, and postcolonial trauma. Pineau is deeply associated with the Créolité movement, which relates Caribbean cultural identity and linguistic diversity.

In many of her novels, she portrays the female characters who are struggling to establish their tradition and modernity. Her narratives often reflect the pain of exile and also emphasized the survival and the hope. Pineau struggled with her identity as a Black immigrant due to the racism she experienced in her school in Parisian metropolitan suburb. But Pineau started writing in order to console the difficulties of her French upbringing and Caribbean heritage, as her works would connect the two different cultures rather than separating them.

Summary of the Novel

The novel tells the story of Félicie, a young Guadeloupean girl and the narrator who was raised by her grandmother Man Ya after being abandoned by her mother, Aurélie in her childhood. Félicie grew up by her grandmother in Guadeloupe surrounded by the Caribbean tradition, culture and emotional warmth. A fact which causes great pain and bitterness for her mother, Man Ya who was taking care of Félicie without any assistance from Aurélie and also neither she got any communication nor received any letter from Aurelie which was the only way to communicate with the outside world during that time. Her peaceful life was changed when she was sent to France to live with her mother in a Parisian suburb all of a sudden. But she never forgot the informal education given by her grandmother while staying in Guadeloupe and she remembered every single time about her native place. In France, Félicie experienced cultural shock, emotional loneliness, racism and identity crisis. She had to struggle to adapt to the urban French society. However, her friendship with Mohamed, a boy of African origin, helped her to overcome the deep isolation. Their friendship became a symbol of solidarity among all the migrant children who were searching for the belonging. The novel ends with a sense of hope and emotional maturity as Félicie gradually

learned to negotiate her identity between two different cultures.

Chapter I

Exploring Gender Identity in the Novel

Gender identity is one of the central themes in this novel. Gisèle Pineau presents in her novels specially the female identity which is structured by the migration, the family relationships, the memory and the emotional struggles. Identity crisis refers to the psychological struggle which the individuals experience when they are uncertain about their belonging. For migrant people, this crisis rises from the challenges of balancing the cultural traditions of their motherland to intact the importance of the society in which they live. This novel shows the emotional and social struggles faced by the Caribbean migrants in France. Through Félicie's journey from Guadeloupe to Paris, Pineau examines how gender identity is shaped by the family structure, migration, racism, and cultural expectation. Félicie's identity develops through the influence of different women around her.

Man Ya, the grandmother, represents here the traditional Caribbean womanhood, wisdom and sacrifice. Whereas Aurélie, the mother, represents the displacement and the

insecurity. Félicie signifies the transformation and the true identity after all her struggles to establish her identity and to fit into a new place with a different culture and tradition.

Man, Ya plays a big role as a protector and cultural guide for Félicie. Although she was strict, but always she provided the emotional stability and gave the informal education such as discipline and survivance to Félicie. Through Man Ya, Pineau demonstrated the strength of Caribbean women and matriarchic traditions.

Aurélien, on the other hand, indicates the difficulties faced by the migrant women in France. Her emotional distance from Félicie displays the psychological and social effects of migration. Pineau shows how women suffer silently while trying to survive in a patriarchal and colonial society.

The novel also emphasizes the emotional labor performed by women. Female characters carry responsibilities of caregiving, sacrifice, and cultural preservation. The novel also suggests that the identity of Félicie becomes hybrid identity which was shaped by memory, language, race and migration. Therefore, the gender identity in this novel is deeply connected with resilience and perseverance.

Chapter II

Displacement causes divided identity

Displacement in *Un Papillon dans la Cité* functions on both physical and emotional level. Félicie's displacement from Guadeloupe to France displays the postcolonial migration of Caribbean people to the metropolitan France.

In Guadeloupe, Félicie always felt connected to the nature, the traditions and the community. She used to receive the warmth, affection, security from the Guadeloupeans. But in France, she witnessed a very different environment like grey buildings, social isolation, the crowded city and racial prejudice. Here France becomes a place for new opportunities as well as exclusion.

Félicie constantly remembered her island Guadeloupe and her grandmother who looked after her from her birth while staying in France. These memories function as emotional resistance against the estrangement. Pineau suggests that displacement creates a divided identity where migrants feel confused between two worlds of belonging. The novel shows how the migration creates the cultural confusion. She was emotionally attached with the Caribbean traditions but she had to adapt to the French

urban modernity and its culture. This confusion creates the instability and uncertainty of belonging.

Displacement also causes the emotional break down. Félicie had a big attachment with her grandmother Man Ya, but the relation with her mother was distant and strange which showed her the division of emotion, that is attachment to the past and the struggle to adapt to the present. Memories of Guadeloupe and the education received from Man Ya helped Félicie to preserve her original identity.

Félicie's friend Mohamed's character was very similar to Félicie's condition. Although he was born in France but he experienced the cultural marginalization because of his North African background. Their friendship demonstrates how migrant communities create the emotional bonds through the shared experiences of exclusion.

Chapter III

Cultural Identity and Hybridity

The novel strongly reflects the idea of cultural hybridity. Félicie belongs neither completely to Guadeloupe nor entirely to France. Her identity becomes a mixture of both cultures. The novel presents the

struggles of the Caribbean immigrants who are exiled between their native culture and the dominant colonial culture. Through migration, memory, language, and social exclusion, Pineau shows how the cultural identity becomes complex, fragmented, and hybrid in the postcolonial world.

Creole culture remains an important part of Félicie's personality even after the migration. The memories of Caribbean landscapes and the traditions continue to shape her identity. However, she also gradually learned to adapt to the French society.

Félicie's original culture was strongly connected to her ancestral root Guadeloupe and its tradition, warmth and love from the people. But to fit into the different culture shows her the feeling of in-betweenness.

The Co-existence of Creole and French culture reflects the dilemma in language. The experience of alienation in the novel is connected to the feeling of the cultural trauma. The protagonist girl, Félicie, grew up in a situation where the cultural differences clash with the French colonial society. Language, culture, displacement and social expectations create a constant tension between the traditional root and the new environment. As a result, the protagonist struggles to understand where she fits within

these two different cultural frameworks. Pineau uses this personal conflict to illustrate a broader reality experienced by many children or migrants who always learn to negotiate multiple cultural identities simultaneously.

Through this hybrid identity, Pineau challenges the idea of fixed nationality or culture. Identity becomes fluid evolving through movement and interaction. In *Un papillon dans la Cité*, Gisèle Pineau presents the cultural identity as dynamic and hybrid rather than fixed. Through Félicie's experiences of migration and displacement from her homeland to France, the novel explores the tensions between Caribbean heritage and French modernity.

Chapter IV

New Beginning and Transformation

In *Un papillon dans la Cité*, Gisèle Pineau explores the new beginning and transformation through the hard life of Félicie, a young Guadeloupean girl who shifted to Paris to stay with her mother. Gisèle Pineau developed the idea that the own identity is never destroyed permanently by the displacement; rather it is reformed through memory, suffering, adaptation and emotional growth. Although the novel

portrays displacement, loneliness and cultural conflict, but it also presents the personal growth and physical and mental transformation. Félicie gradually started learning to adapt to a new environment, to negotiate multiple identities and to develop emotional resilience. Through her experiences, Pineau shows that transformation often emerges from suffering, memory, and adaptation. Despite the pain of exile, the novel ultimately presents migration as a process of transformation and renewal. Félicie slowly developed the emotional strength and self-awareness.

Félicie's understanding of maturity through her experience of migration, cultural differences, identity crisis emphasizes the reconstruction of female identity in a very different environment. The difficulties to establish her identity in a new world force her to be matured emotionally on her own. She learned to cope up with the new environment. Her emotional growth was visible and she gradually became more observant, focused, independent, and resilient. The memories, the affection of Man Ya constantly alerted Félicie about her connection with her root Guadeloupe which gave her strength to adapt to the French society. The transformation is not shown as complete rejection of her root but to learn to combine the two different

cultures, traditions and identities as a new sense of discovering oneself. The friendship with Mohamed helped Félicie to feel less isolated, to get life lesson and to prepare herself little by little strong and to connect to the new source of hope in a French cité marked by exclusion. The novel rejected the idea of a pure or fixed identity of this little girl, instead displayed the value of the cultural mixing and transformation.

Paris, despite keeping its differences, became the place where Félicie rebuilt her identity and could imagine a new future beyond her struggle and suffering. Pineau therefore transforms exile into a possibility for renewal and self-discovery. In many ways, the process of remembering becomes an act of cultural survival. By recalling the warmth, love, traditions and histories of the Caribbean homeland, the main character maintained the values of the heritage and rediscovered the identity that might otherwise be lost in the diaspora environment. Pineau's emphasis on memory says that identity reconstruction is well possible if the individual reconnects with their cultural roots and acknowledges the historical forces that have formed their experiences.

The "Papillon" that is the butterfly in the title symbolizes the freedom, change,

transformation, rebirth and hope. Like a butterfly, Félicie went through the changes in her life with suffering, pain, transition and adaptation to navigate between different worlds and identities. Her journey from Guadeloupe to France becomes a journey toward maturity, self-awareness and independence. Pineau therefore presents a "new beginning" of Félicie not forgetting the past but learning to live with multiple identities and memories.

Conclusion

Un Papillon dans la Cité is a significant postcolonial novel by Pineau that explores displacement, identity crisis and transformation through the experiences of the young Caribbean girl, Félicie. Through her journey from Guadeloupe to France, Gisèle Pineau portrays the emotional pain of displacement as well as the possibility of a new beginning in this novel.

The novel demonstrates that gender identity is deeply influenced by cultural memory, migration, and emotional survival. It also reveals how displaced migrants deals with multiple identities with difficulty while searching for their belonging.

Through the displacement from Guadeloupe to Paris, Félicie experienced loneliness,

identity crisis, cultural conflict and emotional fragmentation. She found herself separated from her Caribbean roots and faced the realities of French urban life. This sense of in-betweenness of two different cultures formed her hybrid identity, revealed the psychological struggles faced by immigrants who always have to negotiate in multiple cultures simultaneously.

Pineau presents gender identity as a way of growth and transformation. Félicie's relationships with the female characters, specially with Man Ya and Aurélie influenced her very much to understand maturity, resilience, and emotional power. The novel emphasizes the important role of women to preserve the cultural memory and to sustain the family bonds despite the displacement and the struggles in life.

As she interacted with friends and the wider community, she became conscious of the differences that separated her from those around her. This awareness generated a deep sense of alienation. She realized that she did not fully belong to the dominant culture. At the same time, the distance from the Caribbean homeland weakened her and she felt lonely and separated from her traditions and cultural practices that once defined her identity.

Language played an important symbol of hybridity in the novel, as the coexistence of French and Creole culture reflects the tension between colonial influence and Caribbean culture. Pineau suggests that hybridity is enriching and painful: it allows the coexistence of multiple cultural influences, but it also gives the uncertainty, instability and a constant search for belonging.

Despite the suffering caused by dislocation, the novel also presents migration as a way of possibility of transformation and new beginning. Félicie's experiences in the cité gradually led her to the emotional growth and self-awareness. Through loneliness, friendship, memory, and adaptation, she learned how to survive in a hostile environment and to develop own strength. Her friendship with Mohamed was important because it offered solidarity and emotional support in the marginalized community. The relation with Man Ya or with Mohamed helped Félicie to move on from the isolation and to discover hope in difficult situations.

Un papillon dans la Cité demonstrates the experiences of childhood and adolescence within the context of migration. The narrative emphasizes the perspective of a young protagonist who is still in the process of discovering her identity while tackling the

social realities of life in an immigrant environment. Through this youthful perspective, Pineau highlights the weakness of the children growing up in the diaspora communities, where cultural differences and experiences of marginalization can shape their self-understanding from an early age. The novel therefore focuses strongly on the emotional sensitivity of youth and the early stages of identity formation.

Ultimately, *Un papillon dans la Cité* presents identity as smooth, evolving, and deeply influenced by the migration and cultural differences. Through Félicie's journey, Gisèle Pineau highlights the struggles of all the migrant women or the children who always have to negotiate with race, gender, memory, and belonging in the postcolonial societies. The novel demonstrates that displacement may harm the identity, but it can also create new opportunities for transformation, resilience, and new beginning. Pineau's work therefore becomes a powerful reflection on exile, hybridity, and the human capacity to rebuild identity and hope in unfamiliar spaces.

REFERENCES

1. Suárez, Lucía M. "Gisèle Pineau: Writing the Dimensions of Migration." *World Literature Today*, vol. 75, no. 3/4, 2001, p. 8, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40156744>.
2. "Bot Verification." *Literaturfestival.com*, literaturfestival.com/en/authors/gisele-pineau/
3. LeMouleTV. "Rencontre Littéraire: Une Heure Avec... Gisèle PINEAU et Présentation de 'La Vie Privée D'oubli.'" *YouTube*, 12 Aug. 2024, www.youtube.com/watch?v=25v4hgP6Fb0.
4. La Grande Librairie - France Télévisions. "Hommage à Maryse Condé." *YouTube*, 4 Apr. 2024, www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLtY_Em0tbY.
5. Sinha, Trayee. "The Identity of the Caribbean 'Others.'" *Multidisciplinary Representations of Home and Homeland in Diaspora*, Routledge, Dec. 2024, pp. 85–99, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003373056-7>.
6. "Essai Sur Un Papillon Dans La Cité | the Mixxer." *Language-Exchanges.org*, 2026, www.language-exchanges.org/writing/essai-sur-un-papillon-dans-la-cite.
7. Nabarrete, Mary Camilo. "Un Papillon Dans La Cité - Gisèle Pineau 3ème Edition (2010)." *Scribd*, 2026, www.scribd.com/document/578313033/Un-Papillon-dans-la-cite-Gisele-Pineau-3eme-edition-2010.
8. Oluremi, David. "ADEJUMO DIANE Identity Crisis and Cultural Displacement in Un Papillon Dans La Cité, L'Exil Selon Julia,..." *ResearchGate*, unknown, 8 Mar. 2026,

- www.researchgate.net/publication/401677039_ADEJUMO_DIANE_Identity_crisis_and_cultural_displacement_in_Un_papillon_dans_la_cite_L.
9. "Un Papillon Dans Le Cité." *La Littérature Française*, 23 Sept. 2016, sjcfrench.wordpress.com/2016/09/23/un-papillon-dans-le-cite/.
 10. Wikipedia Contributors. "Gisèle Pineau." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 7 Oct. 2023, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gis%C3%A8le_Pineau.
 11. bee, Bumble. "? Un Papillon Dans La Cité – Extended Analysis." *Scribd*, 2026, www.scribd.com/document/1007136880/Un-Papillon-Dans-La-Cite-Extended-Analysis.
 12. Pineau, Gisèle. "Un papillon dans la cité." (2016): 1-128.