

# Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux: A Pioneer of Comparative Family History and Historical Demography

Luminița Dumănescu

*Babeș-Bolyai University, Centre for Population Studies, Cluj-Napoca, Romania,  
luminita.dumanescu@ubbcluj.ro*

For more than four decades, Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux has played a decisive role in shaping the historical study of family, demography, and social reproduction in Europe. As *Maître de conférences* at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) she stands among the foremost figures of the “new family history,” a field that has redefined our understanding of households, kinship, and demographic behaviour from the early modern period to the twentieth century. Her work, distinguished by its systematic comparative perspective and its methodological openness, has offered historians a powerful lens through which to interpret the intricate relationships between social structures, demographic regimes, and cultural norms.

Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux was born in Villeneuve-sur-Lot, France, the daughter of François Chamoux, a distinguished French Hellenist and archaeologist, member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres and, since 1991, honorary member of the Romanian Academy. She graduated from the Sorbonne and obtained her PhD in History under the supervision of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, known especially for his seminal monograph *Montaillou, village occitan*. Fauve-Chamoux self-identifies as a Braudelian historian, committed to exploring a past unconstrained by temporal or spatial boundaries. Her work demonstrates an exceptional capacity to explain family patterns across centuries, to compare mechanisms shaping social groups from one generation to the next, and to integrate interdisciplinary and comparative methodologies. Over the course of her career, she has collaborated with some of the most influential figures in social history and historical demography, including Fernand Braudel, Peter Laslett, Jacques Dupâquier, Jacques Le Goff, Sir Anthony Wrigley, Richard Wall, and Le Roy Ladurie himself.

Her scholarly trajectory has been closely tied to the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS) from 1967 to the present. Serving as research director between 1967 and 1974, coordinator of the institution's cultural exchange programs beginning in 1973, and professor and senior researcher from 1985 onward, she devoted herself both to her own research and to the training of numerous students and scholars. Following her retirement in 2012, Professor Fauve-Chamoux continued to teach Family History and Historical Demography at EHESS on a voluntary basis.

Her academic activity includes appointments as visiting professor at the University of Montreal, invited researcher at the Polish Academy of Sciences (1982–1985), honorary professor at the University of Salta (Argentina), and, since 2016, emeritus professor at the University of the Western Cape (South Africa), within the Department of Statistics and Population Studies.

Between 1985 and 2010, she served as Secretary General of the International Commission for Historical Demography, promoting historical demography and family history worldwide from a comparative and gender-oriented perspective. In this capacity, she organized major international events, including the congresses held in Stuttgart (1985), Madrid (1990), Montréal (1995), Oslo (2000), Sydney (2005), Amsterdam (2010), and Jinan (2015).

Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux is a member of numerous scientific associations and editorial boards, including *Continuity and Change*, *The History of the Family*, *Annales de Démographie Historique*, and the *Romanian Journal of Population Studies*, the latter since its founding. She has served as editor of the *Revue de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, president of the International Committee of H-Net/Humanities Online, co-chair of the “Family-Demography” network of the European Social Science History Conference, and principal investigator for major European research projects such as *The Socio-economic Role of Domestic Service as a Factor of European Identity* and *Gender & Well-Being. Interactions between Work, Family and Public Policies*. Her contributions have fundamentally enriched historical demography and adjacent fields, as reflected in her extensive output: sixteen authored or edited books and hundreds of scholarly articles. Her research spans family history, Malthusianism, gender inequality, illegitimacy, celibacy, widowhood, inheritance, and systems of property transmission.

Major publications include: *Malthus hier et aujourd'hui* (ed., 1984); *Evolution agraire et croissance démographique* (ed., 1987); *Socio-economic Consequences of Sex-Ratios in Historical Perspective, 1500–1980* (with Sølvi Sogner, 1994); *House and the Stem-Family in EurAsian Perspective* (with Emiko Ochiai, eds., 1998); *The Transmission of Well-Being. Gendered Marriage Strategies and Inheritance Systems in*

*Europe (17th–20th Centuries)* (with Margarida Durães, Llorenç Ferrer, and Jan Kok, 2009). In 2016 she co-edited, with Ioan Bolovan and Sølvi Sogner, *A Global History of Historical Demography. Half a Century of Interdisciplinarity*, a synthesis that documents the evolution of the field over the last fifty years.

Scholars have identified two central themes that characterize her decades-long research agenda: the structure of the domestic group—including its composition, family forms, inheritance practices, succession, and migration—and, more recently, gender relations as a lens through which family systems are reassessed. Her gender-sensitive approach has demonstrated that women played a far more significant role within domestic groups than earlier historiography had acknowledged. As Marie-Pierre Arrizabalaga noted, Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux has had the extraordinary merit of internationalizing the debate on family forms. While much of her work concerns the French family system, her comparative perspective, incorporating European and non-European contexts alike, has revitalized the long-standing dialogue between the theoretical traditions of Frédéric Le Play and the Cambridge Group, influencing scholars across continents.

Two volumes in particular have shaped developments in the field: *Family Transmission in Eurasian Perspective* (with Marie-Pierre Arrizabalaga, 2005) and *The Stem Family in Eurasian Perspective. Revisiting House Societies, 17th–20th Centuries* (with Emiko Ochiai, 2009). The former examines inheritance practices in non-egalitarian societies, identifying strong causal relationships between family structure, inheritance, emigration, and women's trajectories toward celibacy or domestic service. Its most notable contribution lies in the nuanced analysis of gender and inheritance, challenging long-held assumptions about women's exclusion from property transmission. The latter volume demonstrates that no family system entirely excludes female leadership or female inheritance; such patterns become evident only through long-term, life-cycle analysis. This insight stimulated a proliferation of longitudinal family studies across Europe and beyond. Also in 2009, Fauve-Chamoux co-edited *The Transmission of Well-Being*, which explores gendered marital strategies in relation to inheritance systems across early modern and modern Europe.

Her connection to Cluj extends nearly two decades. In 2008 she joined the editorial board of the *Romanian Journal of Population Studies*. In 2009, the François Chamoux Library—comprising over 1,300 volumes donated by her father—was inaugurated at the Central University Library, honouring the longstanding ties between François Chamoux and the Cluj school of ancient history and archaeology. Her collaboration with the Centre for Population Studies has been extensive, including co-organization of conferences,

participation as chair or discussant in Social Science History Association and European Social Science History conference panels, teaching in EHPS-Net summer schools in historical demography held in Cluj-Napoca, and guest-editing a special issue of the *Romanian Journal of Population Studies* in 2013. In 2018 she was awarded the title *Professor Honoris Causa* of Babeş-Bolyai University.

Through the seminar she continues to coordinate at EHESS, Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux has supported the research of numerous students, doctoral candidates, scholars, and faculty members from Babeş-Bolyai University, many of whom benefited from training stages or lecturing invitations at this prestigious institution.

This special issue acknowledges Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux's pivotal role in advancing the historical study of family, demographic regimes, and social change. Her work has provided a durable conceptual and methodological foundation for contemporary research and continues to inform scholarly investigations across disciplines and geographical areas. By bringing together contributions that resonate with the themes central to her scholarship, the issue seeks both to honour her intellectual legacy and to demonstrate its ongoing relevance for the historiography of family and social reproduction.