Françoise Héritier is an Africanist anthropologist recognized for her pioneering work on semi-complex alliance structures—notably incest and gender relations. Today she is an honorary professor at the Collège de France, where she served as the Chair of Comparative Studies of African Societies from 1982 to 1998. Succeeding Claude Lévi-Strauss, she served as Director of the CNRS Social Anthropology Laboratory for 18 years while also serving as Director of Studies at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales since 1980. Héritier is active in the community and is often sought out by public authorities to serve in various advisory bodies such as the French National AIDS Council (of which she was president), the National Bioethics Committee (Comité consultatif national d’éthique pour les sciences de la vie), and France’s High Council for Family Affairs and Population (Haut Conseil de la population et de la famille).

However, Héritier’s life path involves much more than these academic achievements and national honors. Much like her mentor, Lévi-Strauss, who acknowledged that his anthropology career was determined “one Sunday in 1934,” her ability to seize opportunities helped her become a pioneer in this field. Her research path shows that this young geographical historian working on her agrégation was always willing to learn from events. Encounter and departure are ever present: encountering the master of structuralism, less a mentor than a promoter of intellectual freedom; departures from familiar grounds and encounters with new realities in colonial black Africa where a profoundly human
Muriel Rouyer is a professor of political science at the Université de Nantes and lecturer at the Institut d’études politiques de Paris. As a specialist in European institutional issues, her research examines democratization processes in the European Union and notably feminism in France and the European Union.