

Hedy d' Ancona, born in the Hague on October 1 1937.

By Janny Nieboer

She is a Dutch white woman with a Jewish father. Her father was brought up in a religious Jewish family, but he himself was not religious. He was a socialist and an intellectual. The oppression by the Nazi occupation force made him rapidly into a "Jew". Her father was in concentration camps for 4 years. He died during transportation in open cattle-carriages during the winter of 1945 in Poland, 2 weeks before the liberation. She was an only child until the age of 9. Her mother remarried a widower with 4 small children and her second husband died, when Hedy was 14 years old. Then she was the oldest of 5 children. Hedy has not been brought up with active religious practise. I do not know her class background, probably middle class, but when her mother widowed again, she became poor and had a very hard life.

Hedy had experience with migration through her grandfather, who had fled the Russian-Polish army and could not return home. In his moods of nostalgia, she comforted him with her cheering character. Hedy has no active memories of her father. She moved around a lot during the Second World War.

Hedy went to the Secondary School HBS-B for only girls until 1955. After finishing this she studied Social Geography and Sociology at the University of Amsterdam and graduated in 1963. She was active in student's cabaret. She worked in the very new public television from 1962 until 1965. After that she started working as a lecturer at the University of Amsterdam for 10 year, was the director of a policy research institute, went to be a member of the Dutch Senate, was the secretary of state for Emancipation policy for 9 months in 1981-1982. From 1984 she went to be a member of the European Parliament and was the chair of the Commission on Equal Right for Women. She later came back as the Minister for Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs for 5 years. Ending her active working in Politics with another 5 years in the European Parliament.

Hedy d'Ancona was one of the founders of the Second Wave of the women's movement. She founded the feminist magazine *Opzij* in 1971 and was editor-in-chief for the first 10 years. She also was one of the co-founders of the organisation *Men/Women and Society*. She was always a social democrat and a leftwing organizer and politician. She was a good friend of Joke Smit, and encouraged her to write the article 'Het onbehagen van de vrouw' (Women's unhappiness) in '67, that started the second wave of feminism in the Netherlands

She was married and had 2 children, divorced and raised the kids by herself, while being in Belgium and France to work in the European Parliament during the week. Her daughter Hadassah, born in 1971 is now also working in television. Hedy is now a grandmother, active in various national and international public organisations, like Oxfam International and the National Ethnology Museum. With her goodbye at this museum in 2003 she organised a small exhibition with the theme 'The Personal is Political', which is showing now. In 2001 she made 3 documentaries about top women in Europe.

She has always been a public figure and has a lot of public exposure and probably will be for a long time. She is one of the women who represented the women's issue in the Netherlands and Europe for over the last 35 years.

I have been at an event, where she was the Sunday morning lecturer once in 1988. When I worked in the Emancipation Bureau from 1983-1987, the women's policy on governmental level built on all the work she had initiated in the 9 months she was in the government. She initiated fundamental research and founded a policy that was based on the analysis of the unequal societal power structure between men and women. She brought a structural view on ending violence towards women on the agenda that has an impact over all the years that followed until now.

She brought progressive feminism, combined with social democracy into the basics of equality for women programmes. Later a lot of all this good work got lost, when more right wing / liberal governments took the wheel. Policy was less straightforward for women. Hedy d' Ancona was always one of the people who spoke up and she gave numerous lectures, speeches and interviews, tireless to continue the good influence she has continued to have. She continued her political activism via the European Parliament and brought to life a body of good women's politics there. For many years the national politics regarding women were behind the European women's politics.

She is amazing, as she is always staying humorous, light and flexible, but firm at the same time and is never tired of speaking out on issues. She is now both a member of the Jewish with another voice group, having an independent opinion about the role of Israel and as a supporter of Equal Rights for Palestinians initiatives. Besides she was publicly speaking out against the war in Irak this year.

She never made it a secret, that she was having trouble combining her many public functions with taking care of her children. She thinks women nowadays try to be too perfectionist on all their walks of life. For her household etc. she always has said, "we just mess about a little bit". Many students have taken care of her children, while she was working. In her life and work she never fell for the thought, that she needed to step down in her career for the sake of whatever reason, although she has definitely felt terribly guilty at times.

She and her now 32-year-old daughter Hadassah talk about their relationship in public. She also has published a few letters to Hadassah that she wrote in 1978 and 1988, with an answer by Hadassah in 2003. Those letters are public at the exhibition in the Museum. Also personally she had many love affairs and partners who are public figures, although she also has lived alone for a long time. Hedy d'Ancona brought multiculturalism to the Netherlands, as she has always been a supporter of a diverse society. She is now partner with a well-known Dutch artist Aat Velthoen. His drawings of naked women are part of the exhibition about "The Personal is Political". Hedy humorously refers to herself as an "old teabag", still having the privilege of falling and being madly in love in her sixties.

For all the years she was in the European parliament, she lived and worked at different places. Besides that she is living in Amsterdam on the canals. She met people from all over the country, she was a minister for 5 years and is still meetings many people internationally, f.i. through Oxfam/Novib (the Dutch Oxfam-branch).

The Second World War and the history of her father, that she has hardly any memories about, has impacted her life very deeply. Her mother had a very hard time over the WWII and her father being away, and dying in the end. It shaped the way she has lived her life and is accountable for her stand for justice for all people.

1953: She was 16 years old. She was in secondary school then. She was doing a solid education HBS-B, not the MMS like the majority of women with secondary education and a bit of upward mobility then did. I do not know many details about the sort of family she came from; they were probably socialist, as she recalls in an interview that she had to quit the Girl Scouts, because her mother found that organisation "too militaristic". She has probably always been heterosexual. I think she lived in Leiden with her parents. Being in an all girls school has probably been a very good thing for her life and career, as she did not have to develop the habit of "making herself small to please the boys". Girls in all girls schools perform better than in mixed surroundings, when girls develop the habit of submitting to social pressure to not excel!

References:

Website "Parlement en Politiek" (Parliament & Politics), made by Parliamentary Documentation Centre PDC of Leiden University in the Netherlands, the editors are independent from governmental and political institutions. <http://www.parlement.com/9291000/biof/01759> site with biographical information (in Dutch)

Exhibition: 'Het persoonlijke is politiek - door de ogen van Hedy d'Ancona' (The personal is political - through the eyes of Hedy d'Ancona) in the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Netherlands, 2003. (visit on August 27 2003) <http://www.rmv.nl/>

Overview with biographical information, newspapercuttings, lectures, speeches in Digital Archive IIAV, Amsterdam the Netherlands, contents of folder Hedy d'Ancona number 5514 a,b <http://www.iiav.nl>

Pruis, Marja, "Ik ben een creatieve" (I am a creative...), interview with Hedy d'Ancona at the moment of her departure from the European Parliament, De Groene Amsterdammer, 31-03-2001, pp.9-11. http://www.groene.nl/2001/0113/mp_dancona.html

European database "Women in decision making" Report from the Netherlands by our transnational partner Milja A.C. Bos, august 2000 <http://www.db-decision.de/CoRe/Netherlands.htm> with a portrait of Hedy d'Ancona as a model for this topic.

Hedy d'Ancona's voice on the website Prominente Sprekers (Prominent Speakers), talking about women and having children. Website: Jan Stroop Neerlandistiek, Faculty of Humanities from the University of Amsterdam http://cf.hum.uva.nl/poldernederlands/prominent/main_prominent.html

Website "Een ander joods geluid" 2003, <http://www.eajg.nl/> (in Dutch & English, f.i. news) and with a proposal for a resolution in the conflicts in Israel and Palestine (in English under faq) june 2003 & <http://www.joods.nl:9673/rubrieken/printartikel?nr=3099> a book announcement, published in 2003 with a contribution by Hedy d'Ancona. And interview with one of the founders of the organization Anneke Jos Mouthaan <http://www.ncpn.nl/archief/2001/17/anderjo.htm> on the website of the Communist Party of the Netherlands.

Article in Trouw, 21-02-2000, Ten Commandments (Tien Geboden), where Hedy d'Ancona writes her version of the Ten Commandment from the Christian Faith, in a series in this protestant daily newspaper. <http://www.trouw.nl/religieenfilosofie/tiengeboden/artikelen/8761027335985.html>

LOVER, 2003/3 Van Hedy d'Ancona tot Khee Liang Phoa, Requiem voor een staatssecretaris door Jantine Oldersma op http://www.iiav.nl/nl/lover/banner/index_requiem.html

History Assignment 2 Janny Nieboer, Foremother Hedy d'Ancona
*questions for the assignment on the end of these texts

1. Nationalism, racism, ethnic repression, migration. She was a migrant worker when working in the European Parliament. Migration. Her field of study, social geography and sociology, that she has been teaching for 10 years, made her access to the new migrants in the Netherlands, both in her studies and in her life, close by. As a minister of Social Affairs, she has probably personally helped to give enormous sums of money to the welfare state organisations that have shaped the Netherlands for a few decades. Many privately founded organisations have received loads of subsidies as a result of governmental politics. I think Hedy d'Ancona has been very instrumental in making that happen. A lot of this money went to the infrastructure for the migrants. She did not want racism and ethnic repression to happen. She was pro-multicultural society. I do not think she was a nationalist. She has been one of the people who helped the women of Argentine to advocate the fate of their missing children. I think she will not have experienced anti-Semitism very much. She is active in the board of Oxfam international and the Dutch branch. That means she actively promotes a more equal distribution of assets and money (and power) on a global scale.
2. When Hedy's second father died, her mother stayed alone with 5 children. The family was poor. Also during the war, when her father was in the concentration camp, Hedy was not wealthy. When she was an adult, she has always had a good income. Wealth, yes ministers and members of the European Parliament have good salaries. She always worked full time with enough money. She says she has not experienced much hardship when she had young children as she could afford to pay other people to look after her children. They were in her house on a 7-24 basis. She lives in a beautiful big house in the middle of Amsterdam and shared a rented apartment in Brussels with a female journalist, when she worked there. As everybody knows, the reimbursement policies for EU-parliament members were very good. Hedy objected to the accusation, that she/they abused the reimbursement policies of the EU. Hedy d'Ancona tells that she is not materialistic and she criticised the consumerism of today.
3. Her life is proof of the fact, that one person, with a consistent view can have a very big impact on the society she lives in. This means also, that she made it a point, to make the democratic system work in order to achieve the goals that she prioritizes. She was never lazy to not try to give a contribution. In the early sixties she was a member of a cabaret group, who was going against the dusty Dutch climate of the late fifties and early sixties, which had again, after a hopeful, liberal expectation in and after the Second

World War, had become extremely conservative. The Christian power in the Netherlands had put their grip firmly back on the population after the relatively free period (in term of lifestyles, f.i. for young people, men and women, who were in the resistance or in hiding). Hedy dusted the dust off and was not typically 'female', but 'one of the boys' in cabaret. She even was the host for the Television, having a very posh voice then.

I think she was once in a programme 'in the picture', where she was the main host some years ago.

I think she had and still has an enormous influence in the Dutch and international Society. She speeches often, gives her co-operation to television documentaries, panels, openings and has written many articles for the general public.

4. Famous. In all aspects her life and deeds have a meaning and an enormous impact. I think her impact and fame are also due to her tireless commitment. She is always showing up and participating in public discussions. She is still a lot on television. When she was in Brussels and Strasbourg, she was more invisible in the national context, as she was away a lot. For women's issues there, she was always initiating things and speaking out.
5. I think that she seized every opportunity she saw to do what she thought was right. I think some of what she has achieved has to do with being a Jew (I consider her a Jewish woman, in spite of her mother not being Jewish). Because of the old motivation to be found in many Jews to be driven by the desire and the wish to "set things right" and bring justice to unjust situations. She also is an advocate of the use of clear thinking and intellectual capacities to add independent thinking to the world and act upon that thinking. In that tradition, Hedy d'Ancona had many predecessors in the Netherlands. Many famous feminists like Aletta Jacobs and Rosa Manus of the First Wave of Feminism in the beginning of the 20th Century (<http://www.alettajacobs.org> in Dutch or <http://www.alettajacobs.org/english/index.html>) were Jewish women, a phenomenon to be found in the Netherlands as well as in other European countries, f.i. Hungary. The other part of what she achieved was a result of working enormously hard. The third part was being in the right place at the right time (Amsterdam, late sixties and early seventies), where she was at the centre of all new things happening. It was also a very good thing, that she was active in the Social Democratic Party, as this is a very powerful and important both formal and informal social network. I think part of her success was also her strong circle of Jewish and gentile friends, which shaped the history of Amsterdam and the Netherlands. I think, informally she has been backing hundreds of people to take on challenges and take on responsibilities. She has also developed the ability to loose (in love and life) and get over it, move on and take on new lovers. That gave her the opportunity to also achieve personal happiness. But on the other hand, at times, she put work before her personal life, and that has also contributed greatly to her successes.
6. In a way she is not a controversial person, so she knows how to speak and connect people over boundaries, that other would break their teeth on. It may even be possible, that she was so closely linked to certain leading (male) politicians in the Netherlands, that also in that way she may have had a big influence on how things have been going in this country.

September 1 2003.

- from the Workbook of the NOISE summerschool 2003 (http://www.let.uu.nl/womens_studies/summerschool2003/programme.html)

History Assignments:

Aim of the history assignments and foremother-workshops

In the workshops we address the ways in which one can understand and give meaning to collected historical facts about the life of one particular woman. We think it is important to be aware that writing 'women's history' is never only the collection of facts & figures about women in the past. In order to understand and give meaning to those lives we need concepts, stories, narratives, systems of meaning. In order to give feminist meaning to gender, it is necessary to address questions of race and class, and to be critical of traditional historical narratives about national, economic, political and cultural developments. Starting with the lives of 'foremothers' we will discuss how gender, race and class intersected in her life and how one can conceptualize the story of her experience without repeating traditional historical narratives. The last workshop will be devoted to making digital and material exhibitions about the foremothers

History Assignment 1

Find out as much as possible about the life of a woman who was alive and more or less grown-up in the 1950's. This may be a relative (grandmother, aunt) a friend or somebody who was a public figure in your country. We advise you to find someone who matters to you personally, this may be either as a political or intellectual inspiration, or as a person you know or are related to. We will refer to this woman as the 'foremother' but she should not necessarily be a family-realtion. You will have to bring a one-page description of this woman to the summerschool. That page should be structured as follows:

- Begin by writing down the name, place & date of birth (and death)
- Then try to describe her in terms of nationality, class, ethnicity and religion. Did she receive education? (
- Then try to write something about her experience with locatedness: did she herself live in the same place during her whole life? Did she meet people from other regions of her country, from other parts of Europe, from other parts of the world? Did she lose family or friends through migration?
- Finally describe her life in 1953: family-relations, job, sexuality, where and how did she live?

To gather information you may both use informal sources: memories & recollections, stories and anecdotes, conversations with friends and relatives, as well as more formalized sources: history books, archival materials, newspaperclippings. Include references to your information-sources.

The one page life you must post on the website of the Noise Summerschool - instructions will follow, make sure you have a word-file with the assignments.

History assignment 2

(read chapters from Griffin & Braidotti) from the book *Thinking Differently, A Reader in European Women's Studies*, G.Griffin & R. Braidotti (eds.), ZedBooks, London, 2002 (see <http://www.let.uu.nl/~rosi.braidotti/personal/books.htm>)

Prepare for a discussion in the workshop on the following list of questions. Be prepared to learn from the findings of other students and to teach them about your own findings. Try to find out something about every issue but elaborate on at least one of them.

1. Did she have any experience with nationalism, racism, ethnic repression, migration (herself, or to/from the place where she lived)?
2. Did she experience poverty and/or wealth?
3. Does the story of her life throw new light on 'big' histories like that about colonialism, democracy, Cold War, dictatorship?
4. Are the facts and the story of her life (or parts of her life) famous or forgotten? In what contexts can her experiences have a meaning? What factors have caused her fame or her invisibility?

Assignment written by authors Andrea Peto (<http://www.nextwave.hu/peto/>), University of Miskolc, Hungary and Berteke Waaldijk (<http://www.let.uu.nl/~berteke.waaldijk/personal/>), Utrecht University, the Netherlands, teachers in the NOISE summerschool 2003 in Antwerp, Belgium 8-19 September 2003 (http://www.let.uu.nl/womens_studies/summerschool)

Author

Janny Nieboer, H.J. Schimmelplein 22, 3532 TE Utrecht, the Netherlands, phone 31 30 2935734, work International Office Women's Studies, Faculty of Arts, Utrecht University, Muntstraat 2-A, 3512 EV Utrecht, the Netherlands, phone 31 30 2536013, <mailto:Janny.Nieboer@let.uu.nl>