

Rebel with a Cause

Dutch Children's Author Miep Diekmann as the Personification of '68

HELMA VAN LIEROP-DEBRAUWER

The rebellious spirit of 1968 was characterised, among other things, by a strong aversion to authority of any form. In Dutch children's literature, this spirit is personified by the author Miep Diekmann. From the end of the 1950s until the end of the 1980s, Diekmann contested all kinds of social injustice, both in her children's books and in her critical work. This article discusses how she challenged the status quo in Dutch children's literature, firstly through her efforts to improve the cultural status of children's literature, and secondly through writing books with a different view of the world than the one with which children were then familiar. In interviews, reviews, and discussions with politicians, she successfully appealed for more academic and critical attention for books for young readers. With her children's books she wanted to make her readers think independently about all kinds of social injustice. Whereas in her first books a tension can be observed between her ambition to make children aware of forms of inequality and her intention to let her reading audience judge for themselves, in her later novels, in particular in *De dagen van olim*, [The Days of Yore] (1971), she presents social injustice in a way that leaves more to the imagination of her readers.

In his book about the revolutionary social movements in 1968, Mark Kurlansky declared it »the year that rocked the world«: »What was unique about 1968 was that people were rebelling over disparate issues and had in common only that desire to rebel, ideas about how to do it, a sense of alienation from the established order, and a profound distaste of authoritarianism in any form.« (Kurlansky 2005, p. xvii) The rebellious spirit Kurlansky associates with the 1968 movement can also be seen in the Dutch children's author Miep Diekmann (1925–2017); it characterised the role she played in children's literature between the end of the 1950s and the late 1980s in The Netherlands and abroad. Diekmann revolted against structural inequality of all kinds, particularly gender and ethnic inequality, but she also rebelled against power hierarchies in intergenerational relations, and against the unequal cultural status of children's and adult literature. She voiced her rebellious opinions not only through her books, but also as a children's literature critic and as a coach for authors writing under difficult circumstances.

The aim of this article is twofold. Firstly, I will discuss Diekmann's efforts in the 1960s and 1970s to improve the infrastructural conditions of children's literature in The Netherlands and in other countries and her endeavours to generally raise the status of books for young readers. Secondly, I will analyse her adolescent novel *De dagen van olim* [The Days of Yore], published in 1971, as a representative example of how Diekmann uses literature in her fight for the right of every individual to be included. In my analysis, I will apply the concept of intersectionality to point out how, in this novel, Diekmann's campaign against gender-, ethnic- and age-related inequality is fleshed out in literary form, and how she pioneered developments in young adult literature, which only became established over a decade later.

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A passionate advocate of children's literature¹

Even if Miep Diekmann had never written a book for young readers and had only focused on her work on literature – articles, reviews, interviews, quotes and lectures – even then she would have deserved to have been honoured. She is the Cassandra of children's literature. She yells where others passively mumble, she swears where others kindly protest, she never stops warning. She warns against intellectual poverty, dumbing down, commercialisation, patronisation, old-fashioned ethics, torpor, and, most of all, indifference (van den Hoven 1998, p. 76).²

These are the words used by the jury of the Dutch State Prize of Children's Literature in 1970 to characterise Miep Diekmann's contribution to the emancipation of Dutch children's literature in the 1960s. The jury had high praise for her books for young people, but also acknowledged her efforts to raise the quality and the cultural status of books for young readers. In their laudation, they paid tribute to her idiosyncrasy. With her aversion to inequality and authority, and the often unorthodox ways in which she protested against them, Diekmann found herself in good company in the rebellious 1960s; a decade³ marked by new orientations towards gender, class, ethnicity and age hierarchies (Ward 2010). However, her dedication to and her efforts to improve equality of all kinds goes back much further and is rooted in her youth; more particularly in the 1930s, when she lived for four years in Curaçao, the then Dutch colony belonging to the Netherlands Antilles (van den Hoven 1998, p. 77). Her upbringing in this bicultural environment had taught her that some people were visible and heard, while others were ignored and unacknowledged. She was particularly annoyed by the fact that black people were absent in the books she had read in school because it felt as if their existence was denied (Staal 1997, p. 11³). Her years in the Netherlands Antilles had a profound effect on the rest of her life. Influenced by the inequalities she observed between black and white – but also, as we will see, between men and women and between adults and children – a plea for equal rights for all became the unifying thread in her life, in her books, and in her fight for the professionalisation and acknowledgement of the field of children's literature.

In The Netherlands, Diekmann was an active member of the Dutch Association of Writers and she promoted and founded a special working group of children's book authors to improve their social status. However, her most significant contributions towards a better infrastructure for children's literature lay in her efforts to increase the number of children's book awards and to promote the academic study of children's literature; she considered both to be of major importance for an appreciation of children's literature equal to its adult counterpart. In 1960, there was only one children's book prize in The Netherlands, *Kinderboek van het jaar*, [Children's Book of the Year], and it was limited to books for children up to the age of thirteen. This prompted her to start a campaign for a separate award for young adult novels. Diekmann emphasised the need to pay more attention to books for adolescents. She was of the opinion that literature could contribute to their identity formation, and that books could teach them to stand up for themselves

¹ Parts of this section were published in German in van Lierop-Debrauwer (2008): Miep Diekmann. In: Franz, Kurt / Lange, Günter / Payrhuber, Franz-Josef (eds.): *Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Ein Lexikon*. 34. Erg.-Lfg. Meitingen, pp. 1–23

² Unless otherwise specified, all translations are by the author.

³ Although the 1960s are often referred to as a fixed period, Ward rightly argues that reality is different »[...] because history never pauses to check the date on the calendar« (p. 5). Developments ascribed to the 1960s often already had their start much earlier in time.

and to develop a critical attitude towards society (de Vries 1998, p. 25). Her lobbying activities among the individuals and institutions responsible for literary prizes bore fruit, resulting in the first Nienke van Hichtum Prize being awarded in 1964⁴. In the same year, another important prize was introduced: the Dutch State Prize for Children's Literature: a triennial oeuvre prize (renamed the Theo Thijssen Award in 1988). Like the Nienke van Hichtum Prize, this award was the result of efforts by Miep Diekmann and others. In her book reviews in newspapers, she had often criticised the lack of a prestigious state prize because she considered one a necessary condition for children's literature to be accepted as a serious literary genre (van den Hoven 1998, p. 78). At policy level, she had convinced the then Dutch Minister of Education, Arts and Sciences of the legitimacy of such an award. Although the award was eventually instituted, Diekmann was still not satisfied. She argued that the prize money should be equal to that of the winner of the Dutch State Prize for Adult Literature. Her main argument was that without children's literature young readers would never be prepared to read adult literature (Ibid., p. 80). Because the minister ignored this argument, she declined the invitation to become a member of the jury of the State Prize for Children's Literature.

The energy she invested into putting academic research of children's literature on to the agenda of Dutch universities was fuelled by the same motivation as her efforts to establish more children's book awards: she wanted children's literature to be as respected as adult literature. Another reason was that she was deeply concerned about the lack of professionalism of Dutch children's literature critics. She considered academic schooling to be the best solution to this problem, but it took her and others more than 20 years before, in 1980, the Faculty of Social Sciences at Leiden University finally established a chair for children's literature. It was the stepping stone for more academic research on children's literature, although Leiden University abolished the chair in 1984.⁵

In her lectures on children's literature as well as in her book reviews, Miep Diekmann considered the sociological and the literary aspects of children's literature to be of equal importance. Her adage with respect to reading children's literature was that it makes young readers »lees- en leefkritisch,« a compact way of saying that reading both enhances young people's literary competence and teaches them to make individual choices in life, to become critical, independent thinkers (Diekmann 1967, pp. 173–174). This take on children's literature meant that Diekmann took her role as gatekeeper very seriously, and it makes her reviews stand out when compared to others published at the time. She compared and contrasted books and contextualised them, and discussed both their content and their literary form. More than once, she opened her reviews with a statement about what needed to be changed in children's literature (Niewold 1998, p. 87). In the spirit of the feminist movements of the 1960s, she was particularly concerned with gender issues and she rejected the fixed gender roles in most children's books of the time because they teach young readers:

[A] hard and inhuman lesson in which individuals growing up are trimmed and stretched till they fit the traditional mould of a man or a woman. However, the boy

4 Named after one of the most important Dutch authors for children in the first half of the twentieth century.

5 It took another 15 years before a new chair was established, this time in the department of Dutch

Language and Literature at Leiden University. Unlike the previous chair, however, it was a part-time endowed chair, named for Annie M.G. Schmidt, the best-known children's author in The Netherlands.

who will never feel like the tough, popular silent hero and the girl who will never become that empathic, flexible human being will slowly stiffen and freeze in that shape (Diekmann 1967, p. 166).

Diekmann's promotion of children's books and her engagement for a better social standing for their authors extended to the Netherlands Antilles and to countries in Central and Eastern Europe. She coached authors living and working under difficult circumstances, such as Diana Lebach and Sonia Garmers, both black, female authors from the Netherlands Antilles (Garmers 1998), and supported them in getting their work published. She went to conferences to open up dialogues with authors from different cultural and political backgrounds on the premise that »[...] children have nothing to gain from political disputes« (Diekmann as quoted in Staal 1997, p. 120). She was made an honorary member of PEN in the Czech Republic in 1994 for her support of authors in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and 1970s. In acknowledgement of her prominent role in the world of children's books and her promotion of the work of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), she was made an honorary member of that organisation in 2006.

»Multiple levels of social injustice«⁶

The social engagement Diekmann showed in her writings and lectures on children's literature also is the trademark of most of the books she wrote for children of different age groups. She is best known for her realistic novels for children and young adults, but the poems she wrote for toddlers were also critically acclaimed. *Wiele wiele stap* [Wheely wheely step], published in 1977, won the Gouden Griffel [Golden Slate], the most important award for a single children's book at the time.

After her debut in 1947 with a rather conventional novel for girls, Diekmann started writing about what she perceived as social injustice. In the 1950s and 1960s, she took up the challenge of writing about black children, as she had promised herself she would do when she was a child living in Curaçao. At the end of the 1950s, she returned to the island for the first time in 20 years to give lectures at schools and libraries. In October 1969, she stayed in the Netherlands Antilles for several months, once again to promote children's literature. During her visit, she had close contacts with the leaders of the Curaçao uprising of 30 May 1969, which ensued from a labour dispute caused by the wage and employment discrimination of black workers. She expressed her solidarity with the black workers in *Een doekje voor het bloeden* (1970) [A Mere Palliative], a collection of articles published in a Dutch newspaper about what happened in Curaçao in 1969. In these articles, Diekmann does not always stick to the facts (Broek 2013, pp. 10–11), presumably because she wanted to emphasise the social injustice done to the indigenous people; a subjectivity that, once again, underlines her strong aversion to inequality.

Diekmann's rejection of social inequality naturally also affected her as a children's writer; through her books she wanted to contest discrimination (Auwera 1970, pp. 98–99). Her breakthrough was *De boten van Brakkeput* (1956) [*The Haunted Island*]. This novel is set in the Netherlands Antilles and is written from the perspective of a white boy who helps a political refugee. Antillean children do not feature in it, and the black workers portrayed are submissive and obedient to the white people for whom they work; social injustice against black people is therefore not a major issue in it. Moreover,

⁶ Crenshaw (2016, n. p.).

while in interviews Diekmann claimed to be giving young people nuanced information about social issues so that they could form their own opinions (Auwera 1970, p. 97), she actually leaves little to the imagination in *De boten van de Brakkeput*. She is very explicit about how the political and economic situation in the Netherlands Antilles should be judged. Here a tension can be observed between Diekmann's ambition to let children judge for themselves and her zeal to reveal the unfairness of the political system in the colony at the time.

The next books she wrote, such as *Padu is gek* (1957) [Padu is Crazy], *En de groeten van Elio* (1961) [Greetings from Elio] and *Marijn bij de Lorredraaiers* (1965) [Slave Doctor] are more in line with her intention to confront young readers with issues of discrimination and racism as well as with her aspiration to let readers form their own opinion about social issues, and feature perspectives of people from other cultures. This ambition is particularly apparent in *En de groeten van Elio* and *Marijn bij de Lorredraaiers*. In the first, the black protagonist Elio is self-confident and distances himself from colonial hierarchies: »[...] no human being is the property of another. That time is past.« (Diekmann 1961, p. 17) *Marijn bij de Lorredraaiers* is the first Dutch novel about the country's colonial past that draws attention to the dark sides of colonialism, such as the slave trade.

The novel most representative of Diekmann's revolt against social injustice, *De dagen van olim* (1971) is also an example of how she tried to give her societal engagement a literary form in order to do justice to children's books as a full-fledged literary genre. For a children's novel written in the early 1970s, its form and structure are unusually innovative. It consists of two parts. In the first and longest one, the protagonist and first person narrator is fourteen-year-old Jozina – Josje – Walther, the daughter of a Dutch police chief in Curaçao. The second part is set 30 years later, at the end of the 1960s, when Josje, now in her forties, returns to the island for the first time after having lived in The Netherlands for many years. The two parts are connected by a section incorporating photos, documents and notes, which confirm that it is, in fact, an autobiographical novel, based on two crucial periods in Miep Diekmann's own life, although some facts were obviously changed. One such change concerns the age of the protagonist. Diekmann lived in Curaçao between the ages of nine and thirteen; the protagonist Josje is almost fifteen. A plausible explanation for this change is that Diekmann's novel is, among other things, about gender roles and male and female sexuality, which called for an older protagonist. *De dagen van olim* is a novel ahead of its time: the dual perspective of an adolescent girl and an adult woman, and the attention paid to the psychological development of the protagonist, make it an early and intriguing example of a coming-of-age crossover novel⁷. Like children's books elsewhere in Europe, Dutch children's literature in the 1970s was characterised by the rise of the problem or issue novel. The development of this genre can be explicitly linked to the many revolts against authority at the end of the 1960s. Through novels about urgent sociopolitical issues of the time, such as women's liberation or decolonisation, authors wanted to make their young readers aware of what was happening in the world. In their writings, they focused on societally relevant content and paid little attention to literary form. Writers of problem novels left no doubt as to how their books were supposed to be read and what message they wanted to convey to their readers (van den Hoven / van Lierop-Debrauwer 2014, pp. 386–387). Like the authors of problem novels, Miep Diekmann, too, wants to express her social conscience

7 Beckett (2008, p. 4) defines crossover fiction as »[...] fiction that crosses from child to adult or adult

to child audiences,« in other words it is read by a dual audience of child and adult readers.

through her stories, but in most of her books her engagement was not expressed at the expense of literary form.

In *De dagen van olim*, Diekmann not only voices her outrage at racism, and her indignation at sexism and ageism⁸, she also shows how these three levels of social injustice often overlap and interact. To analyse this interconnectedness of social categories or »axes of signification« (Wekker 2016, p. 70), such as gender, ethnicity, class and age, I will use the concept of intersectionality. This term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to refer to the interrelatedness of what she calls »social justice problems« (Crenshaw 2016), examples being racism and sexism. In her talk at TEDWomen 2016 in San Francisco, Crenshaw gave several examples of the intersection of identity categories such as gender and race. In particular, she discussed the case of black African women suffering from discrimination in the labour market because of their race as well as their gender. Although politicians tend to deny the interrelatedness of the different axes of signification, presenting them as »singular issues« (Crenshaw 1989, p. 167), these social factors usually interact and reinforce each other, causing »multiple levels of social injustice« (Crenshaw 2016). The concept of intersectionality draws attention to the simultaneous impact of social dynamics such as racism and gender discrimination as experienced by many people belonging to different minority groups. Although the term intersectionality originates from the end of the 1980s, research on the interrelatedness of forms of social injustice is rooted in previous decades, when black women felt they were represented neither by the civil rights movement nor by feminism, which was dominated by white women (bell hooks 1981 in Benner 2016, p. 30).

While Crenshaw applies the concept of intersectionality to problems of African American women in the labour market, Julia Benner explores how this idea of intersecting social categories can be meaningfully put into practice in relation to children's literature (Benner 2016). One of her observations is that age as a social category is largely ignored in studies on intersectionality (Ibid., p. 30). Taking into consideration that fundamental ideas of children and childhood and child-adult relationships are at the heart of children's literature and the study of children's books, Benner rightly argues that age is a social category that should be taken into account if children's literature is to be studied from the perspective of intersectionality.

Girls don't matter

In *De dagen van olim* (1971), Josje grows up with her parents and two sisters. Her father never tires of saying that he would rather have had sons instead of daughters. More or less denying reality, he raises Josje as if she were a boy. He does not allow her to cry, and he never punishes her when she fights with boys. She engages in sports with police officers and soldiers, and her father teaches her to defend herself against boys and men who want to harm her. Although her father does not impose a traditional female role on her, neither does he allow her to make her own choices in terms of who, and what, she wants to be. He constantly puts her under pressure to be and to become what he wants her to be. Moreover, by showing contempt for her girlhood, he denies an important part

⁸ The concept of ageism was introduced in 1969 by Robert Butler, who described it as age discrimination which stereotypes individuals or a group of people on the basis of their age. Ageism can affect

members of any age cohort. However, in age studies the term is mainly applied to refer to prejudices against old people. Here it is used in the broad sense of the word.

of her identity. At the end of the first part of the novel, she is severely injured, and almost loses her life falling off a roof after having been sexually assaulted, for the second time, by Frank Lang, one of the police officers under her father's command. From her young adult perspective, Josje, and with her the reader, believe that her fall was an accident. However, when in the second part she returns to Curaçao 30 years later to the house where she had lived for four years, she suddenly realises that »[i]t had not been an accident. She had wanted it. Because whatever she did, or however she did it, it would never have been all right in his [her father's] world because she was a girl.« (Diekmann 1971, p. 187) Rather than to continue living with not meeting her father's expectations, she had wanted to commit suicide. In the second part, as an adult woman, she discovers that in her childhood she had learned to hate herself and that this self-hate had nearly killed her. With the hindsight of 30 years, she has a better understanding of her girlhood than when she was in the middle of it. The combination of a girl's perspective in the first part, and a woman's perspective in the second, can be seen as a literary strategy to give readers insight into the protagonist's psychological growth.

Her father's behaviour makes her aware of gender issues already at a very young age. Her understanding of how boys and girls, and men and women, are treated differently, increases in her teens when she observes the double sexual standard according to which boys and men are allowed greater sexual freedom than girls, and girls are repressed and punished for being sexually active. When one of her classmates gets pregnant, she is sent to a ›boarding school‹ in the US to give birth, while the boy responsible continues his life as if nothing had happened. Josje's classmate had had no choice, her parents decided for her. After Josje's first assault by Frank Lang, she tells her parents about what he did to her and to Aura, one of the indigenous servants who got pregnant by him, but they refuse to believe her. Her mother explicitly belittles her, referring specifically to Josje's classmate who got pregnant: »These kids these days! What's gotten into them,‹ mother began. It's like a disease. They infect each other. [...] And now suddenly they feel like they have to behave like femmes fatales to show what they have been through. Don't make me laugh.« (Ibid., p. 111) By trivialising her daughter's problems and terming them childish, Josje's mother is behaving in an ageist manner. Her behaviour towards her daughter becomes even more reprehensible, when the reader discovers that Josje's mother and Frank Lang are sexually interested in each other. Her father's attitude is more ambivalent. At first, he seems inclined to believe his daughter, but after hearing his wife's reaction, he sides with her instead.

Observations of the tension between the sexes in her environment, and her own experiences with boys, make Josje reject traditional girls' stories because, to her, the world depicted in them does not mirror reality; objections which were also reflected in Diekmann's aversion to the genre in her book reviews.

She walked into the room, took the book she was reading, and laid it down on the floor. However, after a few pages she closed the book, annoyed. Another stupid story with only decent girls working hard and behaving properly in order to get engaged to a very decent boy, in the meantime discussing the big questions of life. Never anything about boys trying to get into your blouse; nothing about uncles floating in on the breeze and putting their hands under your skirt; nothing about your mother's boyfriend knocking up the servant girl. Angrily, she jumped to her feet, and kicked the book away. She would not be fooled, would not be taken in by these cheap fairy tales. (Ibid., p. 95)

In her own life, decent men and boys are a rarity. »Uncles floating in on the breeze and putting their hands under your skirt« is a reference to her uncle Luís, who always wants to take her out in his car. »Boys trying to get into your blouse« refers to Bubi, a boy with a bad reputation. Josje finds him attractive, but she also knows that he would not be interested in her for very long. »Your mother's boyfriend« refers to the previously mentioned police officer and womaniser Frank Lang, whose sexual morals are very loose. He is interested in Josje's mother (and she, although not openly, in him), assaults Josje, and gets a black servant pregnant. All of these experiences lead Josje to the conclusion that girls' stories are about anything but real life, where girls have fewer rights than boys, and are kept down by adults.

Black is not beautiful

Besides the inequality between the sexes, and between adults and children in terms of power and voice, Josje observes another hierarchy in bicultural Curaçao, which is the distinction between black and white people. The white Dutch people have the best social positions on the island, while the indigenous people are either servants, lower ranked policemen or unemployed. The attitude of the Dutch people towards them is, more often than not, condescending or even openly racist. When black people go to the police, their complaint is often ignored, or white police officers accuse them of pressing charges because they want money: »Yes, we know that story! You want to see money that is what it is all about. And your daughters are just bitches.« (Ibid., p. 91) When Josje observes a scene like this, she describes the face of the mother who filed a report: »She looked like a beaten dog; like someone who had been hit in the face with a whip while her hands were tied.« (Ibid.)

One day, when Josje's father cannot find the keys to a cabinet containing secret documents, the black female servants are the first to be interrogated. One of the servants, Paulina, was bold enough to protest and hands in a note of resignation saying she cannot work for people who do not trust her. Instead of offering the girl her apologies, Josje's mother feels offended by her servant: »Insulted? A servant girl? Paulina? I never would have thought she would be that impudent.« (Ibid., p. 82) Josje's mother's reaction to the servant girl's protest is a typical colonial attitude, reflected also in an incident where she violates the privacy of a poor black woman by entering her small house without asking permission to take pictures of »a characteristic Curaçaoan scene« to send to the family in Holland. In an interior monologue, Josje's indignation is revealed when she considers her mother's behaviour and the black woman's reaction; the latter never objects to the intrusion, but instead feels ashamed of the mess in her house and of the fact »[...] that there was no furniture like there was in the houses of the *makambas*⁹. Ashamed because her children were playing naked.« (Ibid., p. 81)

One could argue that by taking the perspective of a white girl and woman, Diekmann subscribes to the dominance of white over black. However, in this autobiographical novel it is clear that Josje does not identify with the other white people on the island, and, by the same token, that they see her as being different because she sides with the indigenous people, for example by learning their language, Papiamentu.

⁹ A negative word people from the Netherlands Antilles use to describe the Dutch on the island, here used by Josje.

Intersecting social categories

It becomes clear in the novel that the inequality between black and white and the hierarchy between men and women, and between adults and children, are not singular, independent issues. The social categories of gender, ethnicity and age are represented as interrelated, as reinforcing each other. In *De dagen van olim*, this interconnectedness results in multiple discrimination. In Curaçao, being black puts you further down the social ladder. Being a girl, no matter what skin colour, means having little or no voice in comparison to both boys and adults, and puts you in danger of being sexually abused by boys and men. However, being a white girl or woman brings you some social privileges. Being a black woman gives you some power within the family, but being a black girl makes you a nobody. The black girls in *De dagen van olim* are disrespected and have no rights at all. Black boys have fewer chances than white boys, but they have more freedom than their adolescent sisters, who have to obey their white employers, and their strict, authoritarian fathers. Black boys can go out whenever they want; Antillean fathers tell their daughters to stay at home. An analysis of the position of black girls in Diekmann's novel reveals that gender discrimination, sexism and ageism interconnect and affect the identity formation of both black and white girls. However, black girls also experience racism and the ways in which this form of oppression intersects with the other forms of discrimination. It is the interaction between the social categories of gender, sex, age and ethnicity that determines the self-image of black girls and their adjustments to male and white normativity. In *De dagen van olim*, the disadvantages of being a black girl are best represented in the character of Aura. She works for Josje's parents as a servant girl and is made pregnant by Frank Lang, the white police officer, who does not assume any responsibility for it; Aura raises their son alone. In the second part of the novel, in 1969, when they are both adults, Josje and Aura meet again. It then becomes clear that it was Aura who had pressed charges against Frank Lang in the 1930s, after Josje's fall off the roof, not for having been sexually assaulted by him herself, but for him having forced himself on Josje. The initial explanation she gives for wanting justice for Josje and not for herself is that it was different for Josje, implying that Aura considered herself less worthy than the white girl, as black girls got sexually assaulted all the time. However, later on in the conversation, her motivation turns out to be more complex. Aura admits that it was also a way of getting back at Josje's mother because to a certain extent it felt good to get the attention of the man who was also interested in her white mistress. Moreover, it was a silent protest against the black men on the island, who forbid their own girls and women to get involved with Dutch men, while they themselves had relationships with Dutch women. It was her way of objecting to multiple forms of injustice done to her and to other black girls. The conversation between Josje and Aura in 1969 also shows that although the uprising in Curaçao improved working conditions for black employees, the position of black girls had not changed. They still suffered from many restrictions imposed on them by their fathers, brothers and other black men in their environment. Aura's daughter, for example, is not free to go out with white boys if she wants to, and she is not allowed to wear whatever clothes she likes. Their unchanged position confirms the observation by bell hooks that protest movements of the 1960s, such as the civil rights movement and feminism, seem to have overlooked the rights of black women and girls (Benner 2016, p. 30).

Conclusion

With her activist engagement, Miep Diekmann was a pioneer in the field of children's literature between the 1950s and the late 1980s in The Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles and countries in Central and Eastern Europe. In her own country, she successfully appealed for more academic and critical attention for children's literature. With her rebellious nature, she was undoubtedly of a piece with the spirit of the 1960s. She was a rebel with a cause, trying to give young readers books with an alternative view of the world to the ones they were used to. She rejected all forms of discrimination, and she felt it to be her responsibility as a children's author to make her reading audience judge for themselves. As said, in particular in the beginning of her writing career, these two ambitions – voicing outrage at discrimination and making independent thinkers of her readers – sometimes got in each other's way. In this respect, she did not always practice what she preached. However, her books always provoked discussion because she dared to speak out on subjects that were taboo at the time: the history of the slave trade, for instance, or suicide among young adults. In other words, she captured the emancipatory spirit of her time in her books. A representative example of her work is *De dagen van olim* in which she challenges her readers by showing life in all its complexities – in particular with respect to the interaction between different kinds of social injustice – instead of simplifying it as many problem novels in the 1970s did. With this novel, she paved the way for the literary adolescent novel that established itself in Dutch children's literature in the mid-1980s.

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Short CV

Helma van Lierop-Debrauwer, Professor of Children's Literature and Coordinator of the Children's and Adolescent Literature MA at Tilburg University, The Netherlands. Member of the editorial board of *Literatuur zonder leeftijd*. Areas of research: adolescent literature, life writing, the connection between children's literature and age studies.