

ERIF Sinterklaas Brand & Product Study:

## LOCATING ZWARTE PIET



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European Race and Imagery Foundation

[www.erifonline.org](http://www.erifonline.org)

January 2016



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## **Introduction**

Year on year in the Netherlands, a discussion mounts over the presence of the blackface character *Zwarte Piet* (literally, Black Peter), as the happy helper during the *Sinterklaas* (Saint Nicholas) celebrations.

Sinterklaas takes place on the 5<sup>th</sup> December in the Netherlands each year and is a large-scale gift-giving festival, with a popularity that could rival Christmas in other Western states. Despite the fixed date for this festival, it is accompanied by an annual build up of almost six weeks, first by looking forward to the arrival (in Dutch *intocht*) of the Saint in the Netherlands from Spain, and then a second round of anticipation for the festival itself – usually around three weeks later. Throughout the Netherlands, the signs that the Saint (or Sint) is coming are pervasive.

While many excitedly await the arrival of Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet (plural: Zwarte Pieten), an increasingly large number of people across the Netherlands debate whether or not the Saint should go it alone. The basis of the anti-Piet argument is that the character is in fact a racist caricature of a black slave (especially in his content role of serving a white master) and therefore has no place in a festival targeted at children. There have been ongoing calls for the character to be replaced as well as speculation that the festival – and Zwarte Piets role within it – is already changing. Having said this, there has been little comprehensive analysis of these changes.

We take the position in this report that 2015 is the ideal departure point for such a study to be implemented and monitored. We present the beginning of such an endeavour below.

## **Background**

### ***What is Sinterklaas and who is Zwarte Piet?***

Sinterklaas is an annual festival in the Netherlands and Belgium to honour Saint Nicholas (270 – 343) on the 5<sup>th</sup> December. The feast is typically celebrated within families by writing and reciting poems for each other, giving gifts (surprises), eating sweets such as *pepernoten* (spiced cookies), chocolate letters and singing songs. Young children are taken to parades known as the “intoct” or arrival of Sinterklaas. The intoct usual takes place some three weeks before the 5<sup>th</sup> December adding to the buildup and excitement around the festival. The Sint is accompanied each year by his magical white horse and his faithful servant, Zwarte Piet. They all arrive together on a steamboat, apparently from Spain. Strangely, although Piet is referred to in the singular, during parades the Sint is followed and assisted by large numbers of the character. Each village, town and city across the Netherlands typically hosts its own intoct parade, but each year a different location is chosen for the national intoct, which is broadcast live as part of the *Sinterklaas Journal*<sup>1</sup> television programme. Children are given the impression that *this* Sinterklaas is the *real* Sinterklaas, versus any others they may have seen before. This year’s national intoct parade took place in the northern town of Meppel.

Piet has been presented in a wide variety of manifestations since the Sinterklaas celebration was first introduced in the Middle Ages. The most contemporary interpretation of the character can be traced back to a 1850s story-book by school-teacher by Jan Schenkman. The socio-historical context of when the book was written is important to current debates around the Zwarte Piet character, since the Netherlands held multiple slave colonies in the Americas at the time. Also, portrayals of black servants – with both realistic and grotesque features – in popular culture was habitual for the time, meaning a black character portrayed as accompanying a white bishop would have been instantly recognizable as a slave.

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<sup>1</sup> The television series, which airs over a series of weeks each year and charts Sinterklaas’ (and the Piets’) journey from Spain to the Netherlands, resulting in the national intoct, attended by thousands of children and broadcast live on TV.

Figure 1



Figure 2





Figure 3



### ***The Zwarte Piet debate***

Zwarte Piet's role in the festival – as well as the manner in which he is depicted – has scarcely changed since Schenkman's book, although the pro-Piet camp argue he is no longer a slave; he has been promoted to manager and therefore serves as a good example to people of colour. Some would go further to suggest that he does not represent a black person at all – that in fact his face is black because he traveled down the chimney in order to deliver the gifts. However, saying his face is merely dirty from soot ignores that on the one hand, his clothes are never dirty, and on the other his stereotypical features such as afro-hair, earrings and thick, red lips. The latter points link him far more to similar blackface minstrel characters of the time, which were popular across North America and Europe throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Derricks 2005: 39). Moreover, in songs and folk tales, the character is routinely referred to as Sinterklaas' "knecht" (servant).

Subsequently, there have been many public debates on how to kick Zwarte Piet out of the Sinterklaas celebration, or at the very least, amend his characterisation to something far less anti-black. The anti-Piet movement especially has gained ground and prominence over the past twenty years in the Netherlands with artistic projects such as the documentary *Read the Masks. Tradition is not Given* (2009) and the art campaign *Zwarte Piet is Racisme*, making bold statements to criticise the festival. International scholars have also paid significant attention to the celebration, such as Ruby Savage (2011), Lise Koning (2013) and Siri Venning (2014), who each wrote their MA dissertations on the character, as well as Patricia Schor (2014), a PhD candidate at the University of Utrecht who comments on Dutch racialisations of black people frequently in her work.

Dutch scholars have also spoken out against the celebration's depiction of black people in books such as in Lulu Helder and Scotty Gravenberch's 1998 edited volume and more recently with throughout the more recent edited volume *Dutch Racism*. Cultural critic Egbert Martina (2013) has provided an analysis on whiteness and the implication of innocence, as concepts promoted through the festival. As the celebration travels with Dutch immigrants, scholars have also been forced to speak out against the celebration in other countries, such as in Canada (RNW 2011), the UK (Parnell-Berry and Völke 2012), Ghana (Parnell-Berry 2015) and Nigeria (Stop Blackface 2015). Of the most recent research projects to take place, the University of Leiden conducted a study that found Dutch children are more likely to associate Zwarte Piet with clowns than black people (Universiteit Leiden 2015). In cases where an association with people of colour is made, it is said to be positive according to professor of Diversity in Parenting and Development, Judi Mesman. Although this outcome may be viewed as optimistic by some, it is still arguable that it is not actually important how children interpret the character of Zwarte Piet since adults continue to control the nature of the festival.

The commentaries around the characters, and its symbolic value for discussions on Dutch racism and belonging, inspired UK-based filmmaker Cecile Emeke to add the Dutch "Wandelen" to her *Strolling* series in 2015, which featured two different videos with the interviewees discussing Zwarte Piet in relation to

racism in the Netherlands. Most recently, new grass-roots campaigns have sprung up to, challenge the continued presence of Zwarte Piet in the Sinterklaas celebration (Kick Out Zwarte Piet, Stop Blackface and INARG), as well as campaigns that offer alternatives, such as the art project *A Sint You Want*.

Figure 4



### ***Changing traditions***

This discussion has been carried over to several important arenas in recent years leading to high profile announcements, namely within the education system, the Sinterklaas parade industry as well as confectionary marketing.

For instance, primary schools in Rotterdam and Den Haag (the Netherlands second and third largest cities respectively) unanimously voted to phase out the character Zwarte Piet from their Sinterklaas celebrations within the coming three years (NOS.nl 2015). The campaign group *Stop Blackface* have prominently chronicled the various anti-Piet demonstrations that took place this year, including the use of Minions<sup>2</sup> rather than Zwarte Pieten at a school in Utrecht (Nu.nl 2015), as well as a protest against Sinterklaas parades in the predominantly black Amsterdam neighbourhood of Reigerbos (AT5 2015 and Zuidoost TV 2015). Meanwhile, the committees who organise the local intocht parades have agreed to continually decrease the number of Zwarte Piets over the next few years in the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Den Haag, Utrecht, Maastricht and Meppel (Van der Veen 2015). Meppel played host city to the official intocht this year, where large numbers of anti-Zwarte Piet protesters peacefully gathered to oppose the continued use of blackface in the festivities (New Media Platform 2015).

The decision to reduce the number of Zwarte Pieten is significant considering these parades can feature hundreds of Piets at a time, especially in larger cities such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Also notably, luxury department store De Bijenkorf announced this year that its infamous climbing Zwarte Piets would be replaced with “Gold Piets” during the Sinterklaas period (RTL Nieuws 2015), which is a landmark move for such a Dutch institution.

Finally, Dutch confectionary giant JAMIN made the biggest announcement of all when they claimed the packaging of their Sinterklaas products would no longer feature Zwarte Piet from this year forward (ERIF 2015). The European Race and Imagery Foundation (ERIF) came to learn about this via the InterNational Anti-Racism Group (INARG) who had direct contact with JAMIN. At the time that we began this research project, it remained to be seen whether or not the company would keep its promise.

### ***ERIF's contribution to the discussion***

As strong critics of blackface (ERIF 2014), we wanted to follow the aforementioned progression of the evolution of the Zwarte Piet character. We hoped to assess how much the character has actually changed. Does it feature less on packaging or at least in a more neutral manifestation than in previous years? Furthermore, would the announcements by schools and parade organisers have an influence on how supermarkets and brands illustrated the Sinterklaas and Piet characters?

Considering the announcements for change were made this past year, it would be ludicrous to expect a different Sinterklaas celebration overnight. Having said this, campaigning have been expecting and observing gradual changes in large

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<sup>2</sup> Characters from the Universal Pictures *Despicable Me* films and the new film *Minions*.

chain supermarkets – such as Albert Heijn and Jumbo - over the past few years. Having said this, in spite of these changes, it is still possible to see Zwarte Piet decorations and purchase Zwarte Piet merchandise in the vast majority of shops across the country.

Arguably, certain stores refrain from making a swift change in their Sinterklaas marketing campaigns as they fear it might alienate a large portion of their consumer base – there is after all, a lot of money to be made from the Sinterklaas festival. However, as most products are targeted at children and the two largest arenas that children become exposed to the Sinterklaas festival (the classroom and the parades) are in a period of phasing Zwarte Piet out, one would imagine the products sold in conjunction with the festival would also amend their packaging. We cannot be sure of this. The Sinterklaas Journal retains its usage of blackfaced Zwarte Piets. Furthermore, not every city, town and village in the Netherlands has promised to phase the character out from their schools or parades, so the best we can hope for now is pressure from the cities that are willing to change.

Our aim with this report is not to produce an analytical evaluation of the Sinterklaas celebration or the Zwarte Piet character – this is currently being undertaken by various campaign groups and was the subject of a rather problematic magazine recently (Piet Magazine 2015). Rather, we put forth a candid commentary and assessment of the evolution of the Piet character within this festival in order to establish straightforward comparisons in the future. The current social environment is ideal for a longitudinal analysis on the transformation of the Sinterklaas celebration as blackface is still currently widely used throughout the festival although this appears to be the moment before many changes. We can examine those changes as they appear, assess how profound they are and speculate on what the future will bring.



## **Methodology**

Below is a discussion on how frequently the character Zwarte Piet features in and on certain products, which are typically associated with the Dutch festival Sinterklaas, such as specific books, toys and confectionary products. The research was divided into three phases: part one investigated the large-scale supermarkets Albert Heijn and Jumbo; phase two assessed V&D, HEMA, JAMIN, Intertoys, Bart Smith, Ekoplaza and Kruidvat; phase three focused on products available from Blokker and Bol.com. To assess the various Sinterklaas products on offer at the different shops, we used a grading system to provide an assessment of the various manifestations of the character and how different shops use different versions of Piet in different products.

The research was carried out using online research as well as in-store observation techniques in a variety of shops between October and November 2015.

We anticipate that this research will be ongoing and thus followed up by a second fieldwork period starting in Autumn 2016. The findings presented below will therefore be compared with any future findings in order to explore the evolution of the Zwarte Piet character across multiple commercial arenas.

### ***Grading System***

Grade 1	No Piet is found to be visible on the packaging or product.
Grade 2	An outline of the Piet character features on the packaging and/or the product.
Grade 3	Images of “real” and cartoon white people without blackface characterisations but still in Piet costume.
Grade 4	Images of “real” and cartoon white and black people without blackface characterisations but still in Piet costume.
Grade 4a	Images of children of various ethnic backgrounds dressed up in either Sint or Piet costumes, without blackface characterisations.
Grade 5	Images of “real” and cartoon black people without blackface characterisations but still in Piet costume.
Grade 5a	Piet presented as an animal, without blackface characterisations.
Grade 5b	White Piet with soot marks across the face.
Grade 6	Black Piet presented as a cartoon with stereotypical features, such as afro hair, thick lips and jet-black skin.
Grade 7	Black Piet presented as a real life person in full blackface, such as an afro wig, exaggeratedly large lips, jet-black skin and the typical Piet costume.

## Discussion of results

### *Pepernoten and Chocolate Letters*

Figure 5



Pepernoten – a type of spiced cookie – and chocolate letters are perhaps the most identifiable edible items available throughout the Sinterklaas celebration. As shown in the above marketing campaigns by large companies Chocomel and Mona, brands find numerous creative ways to incorporate these Sinterklaas artefacts into products sold all year round, to give an extra special seasonal touch. The inclusion of pepernoten and letters, and usage as gifts, are integral to the festival. Therefore monitoring the employment of the Sint and Piet characters in the packaging of these products, as well as within the product itself is very important to understand the evolution of the Piet character.

### **Jumbo**

When investigating the supermarket Jumbo, products distributed by Bolletje (pepernoten), Van Delft (pepernoten) and Verkade (letters) were consistently assessed at grade 1. Jumbo is using a more neutral looking Piet on a lot of their own products' packaging. This Piet does not carry the stereotypical, exaggerated features and "he" is also accompanied by a white Piet such as on the Jumbo Lux Letter, which we assessed as grade 4. The Jumbo also sells grade 5 Belga products as well as grade 6 chocolate letters by Tosca, as spotted during an in-store observation.

Figure 6



### Albert Heijn

According to online research, none of the pepernoten products sold by Albert Heijn feature a Piet character of any kind (grade 1). Albert Heijn also sells grade 2 chocolate letters produced by Verkade according to their website, in addition to grades 1 and 6 own brand letters, which were observed in-store.

Figure 7 and Figure 8



## **V&D**

The V&D is currently selling grade 6 Belga mixed kruidnoten as well as grade 1 own-brand pepernoten varieties. On the other hand, the V&D also produces and sells numerous flavours and styles of chocolate letters, including some that feature grade 6 imagery.

### **More examples**

As seen at the V&D and Albert Heijn, HEMA sells pepernoten in grade 1 packaging but chocolate letters with grade 6 imagery. JAMIN, Ekoplaza and Kruidvat also only appear to sell grade 1 pepernoten and letter products according to online research. Meanwhile, large-scale toy stores Intertoys and Bart Smith both sell chocolate letters produced by Vero, which feature grade 6 imagery on the packaging.

### ***Chocolates, Cookies and Candies***

Alongside pepernoten, kruidnoten and chocolate letters, additional sweets are popular throughout the Sinterklaas holiday both as gifts and as treats around the house. Below is an overview of the kinds of imagery you can expect if shopping for various Sinterklaas-themed sweets and cookies around this time of year in most high-street stores and supermarkets.

### **Jumbo**

Two popular types of spiced cookie - speculaas and tai tai – are sold by Jumbo using grade 4 imagery on their own-brand products, which appears to be in line with their apparent brown and white Piet campaign. Brands such as Aviateur, Van Dijk, de Ruiter and de Koekebacker all use grade 1 packaging on their products. When it comes to chocolate, M & Bee chocolollies use grade 6 imagery while Belga strooigoed<sup>3</sup> uses grade 5. Own brand Jumbo Piet figurines are made using grade 5 imagery. Zentis marzipan is available in Jumbo with grade 1 packaging.

### **Albert Heijn**

Albert Heijn offers numerous varieties of grade 1 speculaas according to their website. As for other types of candies and chocolate products, most of AH's own brand makes use of grade 5 or 6 Piet imagery, as observed online and in-store. Certain products such as marzipan, strooigoed, chocolate coins and Sint Nicholaas schuim<sup>4</sup> are available from this store with grade 1 packaging.

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<sup>3</sup> Pepernoten mixed with candies. At parades, the Zwarte Pieten throw this treat at children.

<sup>4</sup> "Schuim" is a type of meringue.

## V&D

It is possible to purchase either Sinterklaas themed chocolates at grade 1 (i.e. no Piet at all) or grade 6 (Pieten with the most extreme stereotypical features). All Sinterklaas-themed cookies sold at the V&D were assessed at grade 1. Certain marzipan products are also decorated with grade 6 imagery at this store.

Figure 9



## HEMA

All cookies viewable via the online store for HEMA use grade 6 imagery and/or packaging. It is possible to buy a Sinterklaas cake, assessed at grade 1. Marzipan Piets and chocolate Piets both use grade 6 imagery, although “red” or brown Piet figurines with afro-hair and golden earrings were also viewed during an in-store visit.



Figure 10



## JAMIN

Unlike their earlier announcement suggested, chocolate Piets are available at JAMIN (according to their website) using grades 5 and 6 wrapping and/or decoration. These are possibly left over products from previous years. Evidence of grade 6 packaging for Sinterklaas candies were also available according to in-store sightings.

Figure 11



## Ekoplaza

At organic supermarket Ekoplaza, no Piet products were spotted online. Only during an in-store visit it was possible to purchase mini-Piet figurine chocolates, which use grade 6 packaging. These chocolates were displayed by the check-out. On the online store, Sinterklaas-themed cookies, chocolates and marzipan are all were assessed at grade 1.

Figure 12



## Intertoys and Bart Smit

At these two large-scale toy stores, it is possible to purchase Sinterklaas-related candies. Intertoys sell candy products employing grade 6 packaging as well as chocolate coins, produced by Walcor, which use grade 1 imagery. Meanwhile, Bart Smit sells Sinterklaas Spekjes with grade 1 packaging.

## Entertainment - Part 1

### *Books<sup>5</sup>, Toys and Costumes*

Since this festival places a heavy emphasis on children, presents and entertainment, we also investigated various products that might be given as gifts and/or used for playing with during the Sinterklaas season. For these products we also included Bol.com<sup>6</sup> in the study due to the popularity of this website for online shopping in the Netherlands.

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<sup>5</sup> Note that any books graded during online fieldwork were done so based on the cover art only.

<sup>6</sup> For Bol.com we looked at the top 15 items only based on targeted category searches.



## Albert Heijn

This supermarket sells finger puppets with grade 6 imagery as well as other toys assessed at this grade, for instance by Playmobil. Furthermore, this store openly sells all of the necessary items required for Zwarte Piet children's costumes, which are marketed using grade 7 imagery.

Figure 13



## V&D

As a large-scale department store, the V&D carries a wide-range of Sinterklaas books that feature imagery ranging from grades 1 to 6. An interesting observation made during online research is that publisher Clavis almost always used grade 1 imagery for their Sinterklaas-themed books.

## HEMA

HEMA offers a Sinterklaas countdown calendar that makes use of grade 5 imagery. It is also possible to purchase a Piet hat and a multicolour face-paint kit for dressing up, in contrast to previously seen costume kits which only included black face-paint and red lipstick. HEMA also seem to want to be perceived as progressive and inclusive in their grade 4a Sinterklaas marketing campaign, with their portrayal of a black female child as the Sint and white children as Piet. Use of a child of colour as Sint was also used in the marketing of the Sinterklaas songs CD *Pepernotenpret* by Dirk Scheele, as seen in our analysis of products sold by bol.com (see below).

Figure 14 and Figure 15



### Intertoys

All of the toys spotted on the Intertoys website – that were specifically being marketed as Sinterklaas toys - featured grade 6 imagery; for instance, a toy set by manufacturer Fisher Price that includes grade 6 Zwarte Piet figurines. Also, Intertoys costumes (for children) are marketed using grade 3 imagery.

### Bart Smit

At Bart Smit, the books available via the website range from grades 1 to 7. Clavis books (which typically appear to use grade 1 imagery, as shown above) are also available at this shop. Two of the three toys/games marketed specifically for the Sinterklaas period were assessed at grade 5; the remaining game was assessed at grade 1. Bart Smit appeared to have more Piet costume options than Intertoys, with most being marketed using child models in grade 7 attire. The web shop also promotes grade 5b costumes – i.e. the use of sooty smudges on the face to represent Piet - instead of full blackface with red lips and a curly wig.

### Bol.com

Bol.com offers a wide variety Sinterklaas products at numerous grade levels, recorded at ranging between 1 and 6. Best books are *Het boek van Sint* by N. van den Hurk, *Sinterklaas en de arme kindertjes* by H. Finkers and *Sinterklaas voor grote kinderen* by Chariva. Meanwhile, the worst appear to be *Alles wat je wilt weten over Sinterklaas* by G. Kuijpers, *Het grote Sinterklaas voorleesboek* by R. Busser and *Sinterklaas zonder baard* by S. de Bakker. Many grade 6 toys by manufacturer Playmobil are available for sale as well as from distributor Fun en Feest Party Gadgets. Bol.com also offers a wide selection of toys and other materials for toddlers, which were assessed between grades 1 and 6. Almost all of the costumes for sale were marketed by child models with a grade 7

appearance, arguably demonstrating the costumes are intended to create a blackface Zwarte Piet. However, Bol.com does also sell costumes marketed using 4a imagery and while there are significantly less of these costumes available, there is potential for a more inclusive approach.

### **More examples**

Jumbo sells finger puppets using grade 5 imagery. Meanwhile, Kruidvat sells toys by Playmobil, which feature grade 6 items as well as a face-paint set, by Goodmark, which is marketed using

Figure 16



### ***Entertainment - Part 2***

#### **Decorations and Audio/Visual Media**

Another important aspect of any festival are the folk tales and songs, which communicate its cultural significance to children, as well as to those who are new to the celebration. The same is true for the Sinterklaas festival, which is why we have analysed the audio media available. Visual and audio media is also important in this context as many children regularly follow the Sinterklaas Journal, which also features story-telling and singing. Due to its popularity, numerous DVDs and other resources have been produced from this series. In this section we also take a look at the Sinterklaas decorations that can be purchased from various shops. Reports based on investigations of Blokker also feature below.

## **HEMA**

HEMA offers grade 5 gift-wrap and grade 1 greetings cards. The decorations and party supplies available all feature grade 5 imagery apart from balloons, which were assessed at grade 2.

## **Blokker**

Based on online research, grade 6 gift-wrap and gift-bags are available to purchase from the Blokker. When visiting the shop on location, these items were also observed. Blokker also sells DVDs featuring grade 7 imagery on the cover art, illustrating that the live-action characters on the recording will be performing in full blackface costumes.

Figure 17



## **Intertoys**

Intertoys offer decorations such as stickers and gift-wrap which both appear to use grade 6 imagery. De Club Sinterklaas DVD is also available according the Intertoys website, which features characters in grade 7 costume.

## **Kruidvat**

According to its website, Kruidvat sells decorations and party supplies such as napkins, flags and table clothes, all employing grade 6 imagery. The shop also sells Sinterklaas is in Het Land (a sing-along CD by Monique Smit), which is marketed using grade 4 imagery.



## Bol.com

The online web shop offers a wide range of party supplies and decorations – the vast majority of which feature grade 6 images. The most prominent manufacturers and distributors whose products were assessed at grade 6 were Fun en Feest Party Gadgets, Haza and Boland. We observed certain grade 1 Sinterklaas decorations, as well as some gift-wrap featuring only the outline of a Piet-like character, however these items are far outweighed by the grade 6 products available on Bol.com. In terms of audio and visual media, the majority of Sinterklaas CDs are marketed using grade 7 imagery, although some CDs use grade 1, such as *Cowboy Billie Boem*, *Sinterklaas - Warme Handed Koude Voeten* and *Sinterklaas Hits*. Bol.com illustrates a similar mix of grades when looking at the DVDs available. Grade 1 DVDs included: *Waar is het Paard van Sinterklaas?*, *Sesamestraat – Sinterklaas* and *Het Paard van Sinterklaas*. Several *De Club van Sinterklaas* DVDs featured grade 7 imagery.

## More examples

Jumbo did not appear to offer decorations for sale online but upon conducting in-store observations, we found that stores are decorated with flags and colourfully wrapped parcels to create Sinterklaas-themed displays. The items used for these displays featured grade 6 and 7 imagery. Albert Heijn was observed to be selling grade 6 gift-wrap on an in-store visit. Additionally, Bart Smit offers three different DVDs on its website, each marketed with characters in grade 7 costumes.

Figure 18 and Figure 19



## **Conclusive Remarks**

A very clear conclusion from our research is that the Sint is almost always presented as an old white man. He is never presented as a young man or a woman. We sometimes see the character presented as a child (and in one instance, as a child of colour) however, it is clear from the setup of the marketing campaign that the children are just playing dress up. The “real” Sint is thus always associated with a white man of a certain age.

The majority of the time, Piet is presented as male and a person of colour (namely as someone of African descent). Piet is most prominently presented as a white male character in the Jumbo’s Sinterklaas campaigns and also in marketing campaigns that feature children playing dress up. The Piet character is especially prevalent within and upon chocolate products, indicating a direct link between the black body and its consumption, as well as a more superficial link between people of colour and brown-coloured food products.

The increasing efforts to remove the stereotypical features of exaggeratedly large red lips and jet black skin on products, leads to a character who resembles a child of colour in some cases. Evoking such an image is problematic as it continues to make light of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as well as modern-day slavery whereby children of colour across the world are forced to work in the chocolate industry, as explored by the 2010 documentary film *The Dark Side of Chocolate*. The parallel that can be drawn between a fictional child-like black character (who comes to deliver candies to predominantly white Dutch children) and the real-life children of the so-called global south (who cultivate cocoa which is made into candy for the so-called West) is staggering. It should be the reason for an immediate and radical revision of the Zwarte Piet character.

In order to avoid Zwarte Piet while preparing for the Sinterklaas festival, the best advice we can offer is to shop for pepernoten by Bolletje, Albert Heijn, V&D, HEMA, Ekoplaza and Kruidvat. Verkade letters should also be Piet-free and Aviateur, Van Dijk, de Ruiter and de Koekbacker also offer Piet-free Sinterklaas-themed confectionary products. The V&D and Bart Smit also sell Piet-free children’s books (according to the cover art), especially by publisher Clavis. Sinterklaas decorations, toys and DVDs should be avoided as the Piet character is presented using grades 6 and 7 depictions. While shifts are certainly being attempted in terms of how the Zwarte Piet character is interpreted within marketing campaigns, the character is still very much a part of the other various brands and products examined during this study.

So far, the biggest changes we can point in the marketing of products linked to the Sinterklaas festival, is the aforementioned introduction of a white Piet on Jumbo packaging. According to fieldworkers who have grown up witnessing the Sinterklaas period year on year, there appears to be less grade 6 and 7 imagery visible on the shelves of shops and on also websites. All the same, during fieldwork, we continued to note a high volume of grades 5, 6 and 7 packaging and products, illustrating a very gradual evolution of the Piet character.

Figure 20



It was very disappointing for us to learn of the lack of truth in JAMIN's announcement to have removed Zwarte Piet entirely from its packaging this year already. Our research shows JAMIN products continue to contain grade 6 imagery, which is the most extreme manifestation of Zwarte Piet without the character being portrayed by a real person in blackface. Moreover, in shops that were not included the study – such as drug-store chain Etos – we observed grade 6 decorations being used during the Sinterklaas period (see above).

All in all, from our research in 2015 year, we can argue that since imagery as extreme as grades 5 and 6 is still in wide-spread use, there is a need to monitor this festival as well as for campaigners to keep up their hard work. We will conduct this fieldwork project again in 2016, in order to provide a comparative analysis on the evolution of the use of Zwarte Piet in packaging and marketing campaigns by these stores during the Sinterklaas period.

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