

ERIF Sinterklaas Brand & Product Study 2020

5 Years of Monitoring Blackface in the Market



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Cover art: Fieldwork photo of
HEMA Sinterklaas puppet hung
in a Christmas tree, captured
in Den Haag, Grotemarktstraat,
November 2018.
Credit: ERIF

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Xavier Donker (1983, Netherlands) received his Bachelor's in Communication Studies in 2008 at Arnhem Business School, and his Master's in American Studies in 2012 at Radboud University Nijmegen. In 2014, he joined the staff of the grassroots Stichting Ocan foundation in The Hague as a communications advisor. Here he has been able to continue his interests in racial studies, discrimination and the socio-economic position of the Dutch Caribbean diaspora in the Netherlands, as well as gain an understanding of Afrophobia at the European level having become the contact person on behalf of Stichting Ocan to ENAR in 2016.

About ERIF

ERIF is a non-profit anti-racism organisation based in the Netherlands, but with members located across Europe, affiliated with international universities, cultural organisations and art collectives. ERIF came into being in 2013 from a shared interest in how European understandings of home, belonging, space, citizenship and identity are racialised. The organisation aims to conduct critical research of various media expressions, provide education for a broader audience and interact with like-minded action-oriented and intellectual individuals across Europe, in order to amplify the European anti-racism discourse. As such, it organises events (such as the Returning the Gaze conferences) and workshops, conducts research and curates content (such as the Quotes of Resistance projects).

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Last, but definitely not least, we extend appreciate and recognition to the organisations - such as KOZP, Nederland Wordt Beter, the Black Archives, Dipsaus, the Afro Students Association, Black Speaks Back, Doorbraak – and so many others - as well as the countless journalists, scholars, social commenters, campaigners, teachers and active citizens tirelessly campaigning to end Afrophobia in all its forms. We hope this report, and the others that will follow, will continue to shine a light on your achievements in resisting white supremacy in the Netherlands and beyond.

The Fifth Edition

Introduction

Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) is the enslaved black African who accompanies Sinterklaas (Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of children) to the Netherlands each year. They arrive for a gift-giving festival, also called Sinterklaas, which takes place in December each year and commemorates the death of the real saint. According to the mythology surrounding the festival, Sinterklaas and multiple Zwarte Pieten travel from Spain via steamboat to the Netherlands to bring presents and candies, primarily for children.

To the average outsider looking in, the festival comes across as an especially cosy or *gezellig* period to share with loved ones. However, there is much controversy surrounding the Zwarte Piet character due to the explicit references made to colonialism and racism through its depictions. First of all, there is the matter of a white master commanding the enslaved Zwarte Piet, continuing the promotion of the colonial mentality of white European supremacy. The references to slavery become ever more apparent as each year, hundreds of “Pieten” arrive by boat the towns and cities all over the Netherlands, ready to happily serve white families - bringing to mind literal “slave” ships from the transatlantic enslavement era (Parnell-Berry, 2019). Worse still, the Piet character is more often than not portrayed by a white person in blackface. Blackness is thereby dehumanised and ridiculed via the portrayal of Piet as a dimwitted bogeyman, who lives merely to either entertain and reward well behaved children, or on the other hand terrify and punish naughty children. The buffoonish result recalls 18th and 19th century blackface minstrel performances, featuring a white person playing the role of a so-called happy servant.

Although resistance to the Zwarte Piet character has been consistent for at least a century in the Netherlands, advocates for this caricature claim it has nothing to do with representing or making fun of black people. Nonetheless, calling a black person “Zwarte Piet” is still considered an offensive slur, as it is often expressed alongside other racist abuse. Take, for instance, the notorious case from 2019, when a football match in Den Bosch had to be stopped due to abuse being hurled at Excelsior player Ahmad Mendes Moreira from the stands (Van Leeuwen, 2019). “Zwarte Piet” was among the numerous vile, anti-black names shouted at the footballer, and it was eventually ruled that FC Den Bosch could have done more to prevent this behaviour by their fans (Derbali, 2020). Furthermore, it is important to note that the attack on Moreira took place at the same time of year that anti-racism campaigners were mobilising all over the country to bring an end to the use of blackface in the Sinterklaas festival.

The report

Since 2015, the European Race and Imagery Foundation (ERIF) has collected, analysed and delivered data and insights into the evolution of this character. Following on from our first international conference, *Returning the Gaze: Blackface in Europe*, we wanted to highlight how anti-blackface activism had a direct impact on the presence of the character in the market. The resulting data and conclusions - in our view - would go on to provide campaigners with consistent data, upon which they could rely in their day-to-day efforts.

Following its reintroduction into Dutch culture in the 1850s¹ Sinterklaas remains the largest commercialised moment in the Dutch calendar, with over €340 million being spent by households (online only) in 2018 (Thuiswinkel, 2018). From online analysis and in-store observations², we now have five years of data that demonstrate trends on the acceptance and rejection by businesses of the controversial figure. Notably, our year-on-year research shows that rather than portraying the Piet character as black (through the use of blackface), large-scale companies are increasingly changing the product packaging and branding to a “sooty” (*roetveeg*) Piet, who is meant to appear like having come through a chimney. Dutch news platform Nu.nl also reported that based on their own investigations, stores were less likely to be decorated with the most offensive versions of Zwarte Piet (2019a). Further, we see fewer and fewer products (online at least) from large stores and brands that use images of white people in blackface (as Zwarte Piet).

On the other hand, when addressing smaller, privately owned and/or operated stores and brands, the same Afrophobic depictions of black people vis-a-vis Zwarte Piet can be witnessed, illustrating that not everyone is ready for change. In short, there are still businesses willing to put money behind maintaining

¹ In part due to a book of poems and songs, which also created the figure of Zwarte Piet as we know it today, for the Sinterklaas season, written by school teacher Jan Schenkman in 1850, called *Sint Nikolaas en Zijn Knecht* (Saint Nicholas and His Slave).

² See Methodology and Results chapters.

Sinterklaas as a celebration of whiteness and the denigration of blackness. This matter was recently highlighted in a BBC documentary presented by Ed Balls, who spoke with numerous pro-Piet activists about their reasons for wanting to maintain blackface as part of the Sinterklaas festival, as a sign of their Dutchness³.

The continued debate

Indeed, as reported by Stichting Ocan, television show EenVandaag compiled data that revealed as much as 66% of Dutch people do not wish for the Sinterklaas parade (or *intocht*) to only feature sooty Piets (Ocan, 2019; Klapwijk, 2019), as they are seemingly nostalgic of the blackfaced character. Nevertheless, at the national Sinterklaas arrival parade in November 2019, hosted by Apeldoorn, the event only featured sooty Piets (NOS, 2019a), despite objections (NOS, 2019b). 2019 saw parades featuring Sinterklaas and sooty Piets - and no blackface characters - in several towns throughout the country, including Voorschoten (Sleutelstad, 2019), Middelburg⁴ (Omroep Zeeland, 2019) and Hilversum (Gooi en Eemboode, 2019). Moreover, Tilburg, Eindhoven, Amstelveen and Groningen each pledged that by 2020, their parades would be blackface free (Vermeer, 2019; RTL Nieuws, 2019; Amstelveenz, 2019; Gemeente Groningen, 2020)⁵. This says nothing, however, about the future conduct of the smaller neighbourhood parades in these cities, which will no doubt continue to feature blackfaced Piets.

Outrage regarding the migration towards a sooty Piet - in parades, on products and also on television - became so hysterical that one pro-Zwarte Piet organisation even began their own Youtube channel specifically to depict Zwarte Piet in full blackface during the Sinterklaas period (Nu.nl, 2019b). This outrage turned into violence, with a Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP) meeting in Den Haag (The Hague) being attacked by pro-Piet terrorists, who destroyed co-leader Mitchell Esajas' car (NOS, 2019c)⁶. Additionally, racist posters depicting long-time anti-racism campaigner Jerry Afriyie as Zwarte Piet were hung throughout the city in opposition to his Sinterklaas-related activism⁷ (Nu.nl, 2019c). This level of anger and intolerance on the part of pro-Piet racists was not expressed, however, when it was announced that the official arrival would occur via steam train, rather than the traditional boat in Apeldoorn, nor when it was revealed that Sinterklaas would not bring his horse (Solanki, 2019).

As suggested by 2019's chain of events, strong pro-blackface attitudes coexist alongside the progress and acceptance of the de-racialisation of Zwarte Piet. This is why, more than ever, ERIF wanted to provide further context for the quantitative data. Therefore, this special fifth edition of the report contains numerous contributions from active anti-racist thinkers and campaigners, who each reflect on the wider socio-political ramifications of Dutch white supremacy, both beyond the remit of Sinterklaas as well as in direct connection to it. Generally, the quantitative results (based on the data collected by ERIF) show a very conflicted picture in terms of what the Netherlands, on the whole, thinks the next chapter of their Sinterklaas fantasy should be.

The social context

The social commentary part of the report (by our contributing authors), begins with scholar Karlijn Völke, who provides a century-long historical overview of the various public demonstrations that have taken place - predominantly carried out by black citizens and residents - against Zwarte Piet in the Netherlands. Nurulsyahirah Taha follows with an analysis of the (colonial) legacy of Sinterklaas and blackface practices in Indonesia. Xavier Donker provides us with his take on the December 2019 announcement that Den Haag would build a monument to commemorate the Dutch slave trade, offering a broader socio-political context for the report. Student Levi Ommen and podcast producer Mariam

³ The documentary episode also refers to the artistic and scholarly efforts of Quinsy Gario and Toon Kerkhoff, who discuss the historical racism of the Zwarte Piet character, as part of a debate with two pro-Piet advocates (BBC, 2020).

⁴ This is a significant shift for Middelburg, given their role in the Dutch slave-trade as an important trading port.

⁵ Following the eruption of Black Lives Matter protests across the globe (including in several cities in the Netherlands) throughout June 2020 in response to the murder of George Floyd, Dutch cities Arnhem and Nijmegen added to the list of locations vowing to remove blackface from future Sinterklaas parades (Lalor, 2020). The move towards *roetveegpiet* was supported openly - for the first time - by Dutch PM Mark Rutte, apparently due to the widespread unrest (Hoedeman, 2020).

⁶ Similar scenes of extremism were directed towards a bakery in the village of Monster when it changed the name of the popular pastry "*moorkop*" (Moor head) to "cream cup" (NOS, 2020). In the same year, HEMA also announced that it would change the name of the pastry to "*chocoladebol*" in its stores (Nu.nl, 2020).

⁷ Alongside his anti-racism efforts with KOZP, Jerry Afriyie's activism also includes a completely Piet-free parade each year in the predominantly black Bijlmer neighbourhood of Amsterdam Zuid-Oost. The parade features a Sinterklaas who is accompanied by children from the local area, dressed up as little Sinterklaases rather than Piets (Nederland Wordt Beter, 2019).

Elmaslouhi give their accounts of anti-blackface organising in Den Haag with KOZP⁸. Gloria Holwerda-Williams (INARG) explains the origins of her *A Sint You Want* campaign, which offers an alternative way to view the Sinterklaas character, as well as Zwarte Piet. Finally, Quinsy Gario discusses the white-washing and trivialisation of black Dutch and of colour contributions to decolonising cultural institutions in the Netherlands.

As shown by our fifth anniversary report, even if progress has been achieved and one sees less racist portrayals of the Piet character in the market, racism remains pervasive in the Netherlands⁹. Moreover, our network of anti-racist voices reminds us that blackface remains very popular throughout Europe¹⁰. Therefore, we encourage you to spread the word about this report, its authors, as well as any other initiatives that seek to raise a consciousness about the draining effects of racism in Europe.

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⁸ As shown above, the Zwarte Piet discussion in Den Haag has become particularly tense and hostile in recent years, culminating in 2019 with aggressive anti-black rallies in the Scheveningen neighbourhood demanding that Piet be kept blackfaced (Omroep West, 2019a). Consequently, the city municipality refused to impose a ban on blackfaced Piets in the Sinterklaas parade that year (Omroep West, 2019b). In turn, a number of sponsors for the parade withdrew their funding in response to a letter from KOZP (Omroep West, 2019c). At the end of the year, new PvdA Den Haag chair, Mikal Tseggai, put forth a motion to remove Zwarte Piet (as a blackfaced character) from the Sinterklaas celebrations in the city for 2020; the motion passed with a majority (AD, 2019).

⁹ For example, in 2020 white Dutch residents of Hoeksche Waardse, a small village on the outskirts of Dordrecht, sent a letter to a local rental agency warning them that immigrants and people of colour were not welcome to come and live in their neighbourhood (AD, 2020).

¹⁰ A special issue by ERIF for *Darkmatter Journal*, which will be published in 2020, offers numerous examples of blackface from across Europe, including in Germany, France and the UK.

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A Century of Public Resistance to Blackface in the Netherlands

Karlijn Völke

Introduction

Throughout the years there have been various individuals, movements and organizations criticizing the Zwarte Piet figure for perpetuating stereotypes of black people and celebrating a racist colonial hierarchy (Helsloot, 2005; Schols, 2019: 26-29; Wekker, 2016: 144-146). Their pleas for change have been largely ignored and their criticisms dismissed by mostly white people saying Zwarte Piet is a positive character, denying it to be a racist caricature, stating it has nothing to do with race or chattel slavery, and accusing the people claiming this of ruining an innocent children's holiday. In the words of scholar Gloria Wekker, this is "the first issue [that] so clearly and massively [...] divide[s] white and black Dutch, although it needs to be stressed that there are some white protesters and some blacks defending Zwarte Piet" (Wekker, 2016: 142-143). At the core of the discussion lies the question "whether the history of blacks should be part and parcel of metropolitan history" (Jones, 2012 in Wekker, 2016). In the words of Kick Out Zwarte Piet's and New Urban Collective's co-founder Mitchell Esajas: "the protest against Zwarte Piet is essentially a symbolic struggle against structural inequality, micro aggressions, racism and discrimination which have been normalised in daily routines, dominant discourse and traditions, but also structures such as the labour market and the education system" (Esajas, 2014).

In this article, I will focus on the public expressions of resistance against Zwarte Piet in the Netherlands to present a historical overview of the arguments and ways in which these have been expressed in the public debate¹¹. This article will cover the period of the 1920s up to 2010, just before the pivotal year in which the existence of the resistance against Zwarte Piet could no longer be denied by the wider white Dutch society (see Euwijk & Rensen, 2019).

Who is Zwarte Piet? An ever-changing tradition

Zwarte Piet or Black Peter (plural: Zwarte Pieten) is the name of a main character in the Sinterklaas (Saint Nicholas) holiday as celebrated in Belgium and The Netherlands¹². As Sinterklaas' sidekick, he features in children's books, movies and as decoration in classrooms, shops and public libraries. According to the national story Zwarte Pieten assist Sinterklaas from Spain to the Netherlands where Sinterklaas celebrates his birthday on December 5th. Upon arrival, which is broadcasted on national television Sinterklaas, dressed in a red catholic bishop outfit, wearing a long white curly wig and beard, is greeted by the mayor. While Sinterklaas rides his white horse into the city, the Zwarte Pieten, dressed in a 16th century pageboy outfit, adorned with black face-paint, red lips, earrings and black curly wigs, hand out candy, play music, dance and do acrobatics.

Despite the often-expressed view that the Sinterklaas celebration is a national tradition that should not be changed, Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet have undergone many changes throughout the years. Celebrated since the Middle Ages in the Mediterranean the Sinterklaas celebration gained popularity in the Netherlands from the 16th century on through the spread of Roman-Catholicism and transformed into the contemporary children's feast after the Reformation. From the 14th century Sinterklaas was accompanied by a dark helper who had various forms and names in different countries, e.g.: *Le Père Fouettard* (France), *Knecht Ruprecht* (servant), *Beëlzebub*, and *Schwarze Peter* (Germany, Austria and Switzerland), *Assiepan* and *Zwarte Piet* (Netherlands and Belgium). These are all folk names for the devil and people depicting them would often cover their faces with soot or ashes. The helper, addressing Sinterklaas as "lord" and "master", played the bogeyman to scare children. Of significant importance in the development of Zwarte Piet's contemporary looks is the 1850 Sinterklaas poem book by Dutch schoolteacher and writer Jan Schenkman. In this popular book, Sinterklaas' helper was initially illustrated as wearing an East-Indian servant outfit (harem trousers and jacket); later editions depict him

¹¹ Due to the limited scope of this article the primary focus will be on *Zwarte Piet* and public expressions of resistance against this figure in the Netherlands. I realise that by prioritising public expressions I run the risk of reinforcing the idea that only the forms of resistance recognised by a white public view - as in considered worthy of coverage by the mainstream media - are worth mentioning. Even though I am centering these public expressions of resistance, less public forms of resistance within communities or the family setting are omnipresent and important. These include people educating their children at home about the celebration in the context of slavery and its legacy or people telling their child's school their child is not going to participate in the celebration (Wekker, 2019: 156). However, a presentation of these forms of resistance would require a completely different method of data gathering and are beyond the scope of this article.

¹² The term *Zwarte Pieten* also refers to a card game similar to "Old Maid" in which the players try to avoid ending up with the *Zwarte Piet* card (Blakely, 1993: 75-77). In the Dutch saying "passing the *Zwarte Piet* to someone" means to disadvantage someone (Woorden.org, n.d.).

dressed in the 16th century pageboy outfit as known today (Blakely, 1993: 45; Booy, 2003; Nederveen Pieterse, 1998).

The first official celebrated Sinterklaas arrival was in 1934 when he arrived by boat accompanied by six Zwarte Pieten: all black Surinamese sailors who happened to be docked in the harbour (Lakmaker, 2009). After the 1930s and WWII, the Sinterklaas celebration - which had by now become a popular folk event - was recognised as an opportunity to boost the stagnating market. In order to commercialise the celebration further, the characters of Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet were “softened”. In the 1950s and 1960s, when the celebration had become standard practice, Sinterklaas was no longer depicted as a strict and serious giver and punisher, but rather as a friendly, wise old man. Zwarte Piet had transformed from being a bogeyman to a funny, clumsy, acrobatic and musical servant who spoke with a “Surinamese” accent. Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet becoming national television characters in 1952 further influenced this process (Van Leer, 1995). Despite this, there were and still are differences in the way *Sinterklaas* is celebrated within the Netherlands and within regions of the Netherlands. Until the 20th Century, gift-giving was only part of the celebrations in the urban areas. In the more rural areas of Friesland, for example, some of the Sinterklaas celebrations have no Sinterklaas or Zwarte Piet. Instead, masked young men and boys go around town causing mayhem. Another example is the *Ouwe Sunderklaas* celebration on the 12th of December on the island of Texel, which includes everyone dressing up or wearing masks to act out local (political) happenings. Schools played a central role in replacing most of the rural, “wilder” forms of the celebration with a more “civilised” Sinterklaas (KNAW/Meertens Instituut, 2020).

The first court cases and Zwarte Piet banned

The earliest public expressions of resistance against Zwarte Piet are individual stories reported in local newspapers of black people resisting being called Zwarte Piet. In 1927, a black man was called to appear before a judge in Rotterdam after he hit a harbour worker for calling him a Zwarte Piet, something he stated in his defence happens to black people all the time. The man was quoted in a local newspaper saying: “All rights are taken away from us, because even policemen are laughing in our faces. Is there something funny?”¹³ He was given a minor fine. A few years later when boxer Albert Lafour handled a few children roughly after they called him Zwarte Piet the police officer involved considered Lafour’s response appropriate and no further action was taken against him. Similar incidents of black people being called Zwarte Piet were reported on and continue to happen (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017). In 1945, magazine *Vrij Nederland* reported that a group of black US soldiers protested against Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet who had borrowed a white American officer’s jeep on 5th December 1944. The soldiers called it a disgrace for ridiculing black people. According to the article, the argument was settled by the Dutch agreeing to never have a person in blackface driving the streets again, as long as there are black soldiers in the Netherlands (Snoeijs, 2015); a promise clearly not kept.

The Sinterklaas celebration was also popular among Dutch nationals living abroad and it was in Indonesia - a former Dutch colony - that the celebration was publicly banned for the first time¹⁴. As the 1957 Sinterklaas celebration coincided with the outbursts of Indonesian nationalism and the announcement that all 50,000 Dutch nationals had to leave Indonesia, the Dutch were confronted with Indonesians criticising and eventually banning the celebration due to its depiction of the previous colonial hierarchy (Gulmans, 2007)¹⁵.

In the Netherlands, the softening of the Zwarte Piet figure continued and in 1964 during the Sinterklaas show on national television, Sinterklaas appeared without the stick which had been used for threatening bad children, as well as the sack (to take bad children to Spain), henceforth forbidding his Zwarte Pieten to talk with a “Surinamese” accent. Consequently, Zwarte Piet became more clownish and, to presumably make him “look friendlier”, he was painted brown instead of black. Four years later M.C. Grünbauer, a white woman, explained in a 1968 interview in a Dutch magazine her idea for “White Peteplan” as she labelled it irresponsible to teach children to associate scary Zwarte Pieten with black

¹³ Original text: “Alle rechtspositie wordt ons hier in Nederland ontnomen, want zelfs politieagenten staan ons uit te lachen. Is er soms iets te lachen?” (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017).

¹⁴ Also see Nurulsyahirah Taha’s essay in this report for an analysis of contemporary practices of blackface in Indonesian and Singapore.

¹⁵ See also the episode called *Zwarte Sinterklaas* of the historical documentary series *Andere Tijden* (*Different Times*) accompanying this text. Note how the article and episode is called *Zwarte Sinterklaas* (*Black Sinterklaas*) reflecting the association of the colour black with negativity, i.e. the day that 50,000 Dutch nationals were told to leave Indonesia, which the documentary presenter calls a “vicious present from Sinterklaas” (translated from: “venijnige kado van de goedheiligman”), reflecting a complete lack of consideration for the experiences of the colonised.

people and unjust to enjoy the depiction of black people as slaves and unintelligent. Despite her letters to organisers of the national celebration, her ideas were only valued at crèches (Helsloot, 2005).

Black liberatory thought represented in the metropole

Protests in the 1970s were characterised by small initiatives, such as celebrations with black Sinterklaas and white Petes; in the 1980s they became more substantial. After Suriname's independence in 1975 the Sinterklaas holiday was officially no longer celebrated there, as it was perceived part of the former Dutch colonial system. The political turmoil succeeding the independence led many Surinamese to migrate to the Netherlands, resulting in more critical black voices against the celebration within the Netherlands. In 1981 for example, Solidariteits Beweging Suriname (Solidarity Movement Suriname) started the action "Sinterklaas vieren zonder Zwarte Piet" ("Celebrating Sinterklaas without Zwarte Piet") distributing flyers and posters to urge the organisers of the national celebration to remove Zwarte Piet. They criticised the celebration for its racist symbolism of white Dutch superiority. In 1986, another organization called Beweging Surinaams Links (BSL, Movement Surinamese Left) distributed brochures entitled "Sinterklaas is een racist" ("Sinterklaas is a racist") and characterised the celebration as one of many examples of slavery's legacy (Helsloot, 2005: 255). A year later, Sesame Street actress Gerda Havertong used the series as a platform to explain to Pino (a character similar to Big Bird in US Sesame Street) how hurtful it is to call black people Zwarte Piet, following her own experiences with her child being called Zwarte Piet at school. The school dismissed her concerns as oversensitive (Kras, 2019). In 1988 author Rahina Hassankhan dismissed theories of Zwarte Piet representing a domesticated devil and someone coming through the chimney by addressing Zwarte Piet's childlike language and his particular physical features such as the red lips, hair and earrings in her book "Al is hij zo zwart als roet..." ("Even though he is as black as soot..."¹⁶). She stated that Zwarte Piet promotes racist prejudice against black people and increases black people's notion of being different around Sinterklaas-time. Responding to the argument that children make no distinction between black and white, she claimed that they make no difference between black people and Zwarte Piet either. She suggested replacing Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet by other cultural fairy tale figures (Hassankhan, 1988). In the same year, a group from Den Haag, the Antiracism and Discrimination Team tried to introduce an anti-discrimination code for public schools, abolishing Zwarte Piet. As a result, some schools and community centers started celebrating Sinterklaas without a Zwarte Piet (Helsloot, 2005; Lamers, 2009).

More mainstream attention

In the 1990s, publications such as *Wit over Zwart* (Van Nederveen Pieterse, 1990) and *Blacks in the Dutch World* (Blakely, 1993) placed the development of Zwarte Piet in its broader context of European art and popular culture. Blakely shows how in 17th and 18th Century paintings and family portraits, the most frequent pose of the black figure was the role of the servant boy or girl, a negative stereotype that would dominate Western depictions of black people in art for centuries (Blakely, 1993: 113). In the 19th Century, throughout Europe it was particularly fashionable for use-objects made in the shape of people to be in caricatured or ridiculous form when depicting black people. This fit into a wider popular culture of jokes, games and novelties like chocolate covered sweets named *nijzoen* (nij's kiss) and *moorkop* (moor's head) (Blakely, 1993). Van Nederveen Pieterse (1990) reiterated the importance of the 1850s colonial context in which Schenkman introduced the Zwarte Piet figure at a time in which discussions on abolition¹⁷ were widespread. The humanisation of the figure of the slave in the abolitionist propaganda coincided with the hardening of the image related to 'race' (Van Nederveen Pieterse, 1990: 58). In other words, slavery's racial hierarchy was reconfigured to maintain whites' dominance over blacks through other means such as the denigration, ridiculing, exoticisation of blacks and other non-white people in the arts, popular culture, science, aid-work and politics.

Since the 1990s, public criticism of Zwarte Piet took place on a larger scale and gained more public attention. For instance, in 1993 at the official Amsterdam Sinterklaas arrival green, blue and purple Pieten accompanied the Zwarte Pieten and Sinterklaas. The following years however, Sinterklaas was celebrated with only Zwarte Pieten, due to the many negative reactions (Lamers, 2009). A year later,

¹⁶ The title is a line from a Sinterklaas song which continues "he means well".

¹⁷ The abolition of slavery did not mean the emancipation of black people. The Netherlands abolished slavery in 1863, but enslaved black people remained tied to slave masters as low paid contract-workers until 1873. Instead of compensating enslaved people for theirs and their ancestors' suffering, the Dutch government decided to financially compensate the enslavers for each enslaved person they owned (Van Nederveen Pieterse 1990: 64). Various scholars and activists repeatedly point to the current social position of black people worldwide. Afropessimist thinkers like Frank B. Wilderson III would argue that slavery never ended, and that it is a relational dynamic.

the committee Zwarte Piet = Zwart Verdriet (Black Pete = black grief) was initiated and organised yearly demonstrations in the centre and Southeast of Amsterdam until 1997. The protests, consisting of distributing pamphlets on the streets and door-to-door caused many negative reactions; during the street protests participants were spat on and hit (Verzet tegen Zwarte Piet, 2007). However, it also led to a petition signed with 1200 signatures to ban Zwarte Piet at schools. The petition was offered to the Southeast borough's municipal executive of education and resulted in the local entrepreneur association De Amsterdamse Poort to have coloured (red, blue, etc.) instead of Zwarte Pieteren during the 1997 parade in Amsterdam Zuidoost (Southeast). Again, the many negative public responses led to reversing this change (Van Dijk, 1998; Gravenberch, 1998). Nonetheless, in 1999 the management of education in Zuidoost created a "Sint Nicolaas code" for its schools, a protocol in which a change of role division, Sinterklaas songs' lyrics and Pete's color were suggested (Stichting Sirius, 2007). Zwarte Piet = Zwart Verdriet's committee members also participated in TV debates: in 1996 in a discussion on Amsterdam news channel AT5 and in 1997 on Barend & Witteman, a discussion program on national television¹⁸. More publicity for the criticism came from members Scotty Gravenberch and Lulu Helder (1998) who edited and co-authored "Sinterklaasje kom maar binnen zonder knecht" ("Little Sinterklaas come on in without your servant"¹⁹). The book included essays from academics, interviews and literary accounts, but strong negative and at times violent reactions to the book and the committee's activities led most of the members to withdrawal from public activism relating to the issue (Westerink, 2008).

In the following decennia, the pressure on institutions and the government to change the celebration increased. In 2000 Organiseer Pressie Omhoog (Organise Pressure up) threatened to severely disrupt the Sinterklaas celebration at several schools in Amsterdam Zuidoost after which the schools abolished Zwarte Piet (Banning, 2000). The recognition of transatlantic slavery as a crime against humanity at the 2001 UN Conference in Durban and the unveiling of the Amsterdam slavery monument in 2002 encouraged Zwarte Piet critics in their battle. In November 2003, the Dutch department of the Global Afrikan Congress (GAC)²⁰ in collaboration with ten other anti-racism organizations²¹ offered a petition to the members of Parliament. They urged, amongst other things, that the Dutch state: take on their obligation to ban racism and xenophobia by educating the public on expressions of racism, such as the Sinterklaas celebration; take into account the interests of all citizens; and evaluate the celebration and abolish Zwarte Piet (Leeuwin & Alhaag, 2003). The petition was accepted, but no further actions followed (Lamers, 2009). In 2006, public broadcaster NPS introduced "rainbow petes" during the national arrival, after the boat had allegedly driven through a rainbow (NPS, 2006: 22). In response to the harsh and mostly racist reactions, white executive editor Ajé Boschhuizen denied the change to be "a politically correct statement", instead it was just another Sinterklaas story and the petes were already turning black that day (Effting, 2006).

Nonetheless, since 2007 Art.1, the national association against discrimination recognises racist elements in the Sinterklaas celebration and calls for "a better pete" (Art.1, 2007). This acknowledgment had little effect. The following year at the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven an art project called *Read The Mask, Tradition Is Not Given* critical of Zwarte Piet led to serious threats. This forced the organisers, white artists, Petra Bauer and Annette Kraus and anti-racist organisations Doorbraak and Untold to cancel a performance art demonstration against Zwarte Piet (Graaf, 2008). The artists made a documentary about their project and the responses (Casco Projects, 2009), which was screened in Utrecht and in Bristol, UK. In the same year, the play "De Schaduw van de Goedheiligman" ("The Saint's Shadow") by Felix de Rooy performed in the Bijlmer Park Theatre critically assessed Zwarte Piet's history. Despite negative responses, it was a success and was also staged the following year.

¹⁸ According to presenter Sonja Barend, none of her earlier shows had ever turned into such a heated debate before (1997).

¹⁹ The title is an altered title of a popular Sinterklaas song called "Little Sinterklaas come on in with your servant".

²⁰ GAC (2019) is "an international non-governmental organisation network that was created by and caters to all Afrikan and Afrikan Descendants both on the Afrikan Continent and in the Diaspora" and aims to be "a central catalytic agent in establishing a mass movement dedicated to achieving unity among Afrikans, on the Continent and In the Diaspora".

²¹ Het Landelijk Platform Slavernijverleden (The National Platform Slavery History); het Landelijk Platform Surinaamse Politici (the National Platform Surinamese Politicians); het Europees Anti Racisme Netwerk (The European Anti Racism Network); Stichting Eer en Herstel Betalingen Surinaamse Slachtoffers van het Nederlands Slavernijverleden (Association for Honour and Repair Payments Surinamese victims of Dutch Slavery History); Afro Europese Vrouwenbeweging Sophiedela (Afro European Women Movement Sophiedela); Stichting Afrikan World Studies Institute (Association Afrikan World Studies Institute); Integraal Management (Integral Management); Afrikaanse Jongerenbeweging ADWA Foundation en voorts (African youth movement ADWA Foundation and forward); Kwakoe Stage and; OPO (Organiseer Pressie Omhoog).

The following decade can be characterised by the rise of black-led grassroots movements, annual protests, courts cases, further attempts to deepen the debate by emphasising the broader context of colonialism and racism covered by mainstream media, pressure on politicians and businesses to take a stance in the debate and the radicalisation of pro-Zwarte Piet demonstrators. These developments have been discussed in previous Sinterklaas *Brand and Product* reports by ERIF (2018; 2019). Due to the radicalisation of a white Dutch majority, its “smug ignorance” and ongoing denial this battle is unlikely to end soon. Thus, the struggle continues and thanks to the relentless efforts made by mostly black people little steps towards more awareness of blackface and racism in general are taken.

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Blackface and Brownface in Indonesia and Singapore

Nurulsyahirah Taha

On a clear day a decade ago in East Java, where my grandparents were from, I found myself watching a carnivalesque procession of floats and performers of all ages, dressed up in marvellously colourful and shiny costumes. Behind a truck carrying a dozen heavily made up secondary school students were a group of men, painted shoe-polish black, with fabric leaves around their waists. I asked a relative beside me to explain this: "This group represents the transfer of mysteries from Irian Jaya," he said, and I remained mystified.

Only a year later, I would arrive to study and live in the Netherlands, as well as discover the "tradition" of Zwarte Piet. I did not make the connection until one day, at the annual concert of my academic institution, a group of students from Indonesia performed a variety of ethnic dances from their archipelago. Decked in costumes borrowed from the embassy, they demonstrated dances representing Sumatra, Java and Bali.

For their final piece, four male students appeared in pitch black full body leotards and paint marks on their faces, accessorised with raffia skirts. Halfway through, I realised that the grunting dance was meant to represent Papuans. An Indonesian friend who witnessed this performance too later told me that every 5th of December, people in her hometown in Ambon – who speak a creole inflected with Dutch words – dress up as Sinterklas, Suarte Pit (also known as Om Pit (Uncle Pete) or Pit Hitam (Black Pete), fairies and clowns (see Dan Goppel's 2016 documentary *Sie Gins Kom de Stoomboot – Sinterklaas Op De Molukken Ambon*).

In 2008, I was attending a conference on critical Islam when the conversation veered to the colonisation by Muslims of other peoples. I asked an Indonesian man in our group about colonisation of Papua and incidents of forced conversion happening there. His defence was simply: "But they are a little primitive, backward, you know?"

Blackface and brownface in Asia

In US cultural history, blackface is used to portray racist stereotypes of African Americans through performances. As a representation of a "subservient black body" lacking in intellect, coordination and other virtues, blackface is an "imposed conceptualising representation" that has travelled across the globe (Reyes, 2014).

In Asia, some recent incidents of blackface in print and television advertisements in Thailand (Dunkin' Donuts in 2013), Japan (Astigu pantyhose in 2014) and Malaysia (Watsons in 2017) caused major backlash online. In Japan, African American writer Baye McNeil led a campaign to remove blackface performances in 2015. In each incident, the initial defence was that the "local" use of blackface does not have racist intentions, but a look into the country's history reveals economic and political connections with colonial powers, and therefore the pervasive ideology of anti-blackness.

The Euro-American discourse on Black people has shaped the discourse in Asia more than actual encounters with Black people (Fukushima, 2011). This is seen in the influence of European and Hollywood films, as well as minstrel shows in different countries. Just as cuisines from the colonies transferred to the metropole (Kuipers, 2017), cultural influences like Zwarte Piet and blackface minstrel shows travelled to the colonies. In 1887, the year of the 50th anniversary of the accession of Queen Victoria, one of the celebrations in the British crown colony of Singapore was a fancy dress race that included racial caricatures of "native" communities of Chinese, Malay and Tamils, as well as blackface. Minstrel parties and groups were common in the 1930s. Each neighbourhood had their own minstrel group that performed at events, parties and weddings. Until the late 1980s, US and British minstrel performances were popular, available "live" in theatres and on television, and described as "good family entertainment" (Kaur, 2019).

Closely related to the practice of blackface is brownface: the portrayal of racist stereotypes of Indians and other ethnic minorities, by artificially darkening the skin, using visible ethnic or religious markers such as the turban and adopting an "Indian accent", which involves head-shaking and rolled R's. The diversity of Indian ethnic groups – such as Punjabis, Bengalis and Tamils - are all collapsed into a single homogenising, offensive stereotype.

Some Singaporeans had taken great offense at the use of brownface in the film *Gunga Din* (1939) and comedy *Short Circuit* (1986). However, in the last decade, there have been multiple incidents of brownface that included corporate Bollywood parties, YouTube channels and even state media (Veerasamy, 2019). These have mostly gone unchallenged, and brownface was declared by government bodies to be “insensitive” but not illegal (Kaur, 2019). Tradition is not innocent either: in Malay folklore, a blackface bogey man called *Orang Minyak* (“oily man”) exists, who commits voyeurism and the abduction of young women under the cover of night.

Performing racial supremacy and inferiority

Showing minority populations with a history of racial oppression as varying combinations of primitive, backward, stupid and/or ignorant serves the discursive strategy of keeping them subordinated. The same processes occur globally, whether as a result of information flow and exchange with former or current colonising countries, or as a proven technique for keeping minority populations subordinated and establishing racial superiority both “on and off-stage” (Reyes, 2014).

The racial dynamics of non-White societies, such as those in Latin America, the Caribbean (see Bonilla-Silva, 2004) and most of Asia, has gone largely unstudied and unanalysed. Within a discourse of white supremacy, the “reality and politics of a middle-racial category” can show us new ways of identifying and analysing racial interests.

Because the discourse of a “Black-White” racial order is so pervasive, one of the common defences of societies without any majority White populations is that racism simply does not exist. However, the examples above have shown that while White racial supremacy exists globally, a similar, parallel process manifests in different forms, as linked to local racial interests. Hence, the dominant group in a society will often enjoy economic, political, social and cultural privileges – all while also being linked to how close to Whiteness they can attain i.e. honorary White (Bonilla-Silva, 2004).

Just as the historical legacies of Black peoples are marked by “slavery, gender-specific servitude, conquest, legal segregation, colonisation and socioeconomic peonage” (Reyes, 2014), so are the bodies of Brown and other racialised groups today, in different ways and to different extents, according to their contexts.

The colonised colonises: the case of Indonesia

The Indonesian case illustrates all of the above processes. Under Dutch colonisation, the practice of blackface was documented in the 1890s when a Malay-language commercial theatre group *Komedi Stamboel* performed stories from *A Thousand and One Nights*, which included a “black-amoor” character meant to represent an African slave. As this actor announced the next night’s play (as per theatrical tradition), he used “broken Dutch mimicking an African” mixed with malapropisms, Malay and low Javanese words (Tjerimai, 15 November 1893; in Cohen, 2004).

In 1945, the new Indonesian republic declared independence from the Netherlands and claimed the entire territory of the former Dutch East Indies. What was Western New Guinea remained under the Dutch until the mid-1960s, when a controversial referendum resulted in the Indonesian annexation of the region. Thus in 1962, with the New York Agreement, it became the province of Irian Jaya and was later renamed as Papua and West Papua in 1999 (the eastern half of the island being independent Papua New Guinea). *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* (Free Papua Movement, or OPM) was established by West Papuan nationalists, who rejected the compromised referendum.

Blackface and racist stereotypes of Papuans justify economic exploitation through extraction of natural resources. Papua houses Grasberg, the world’s largest gold mine and third largest copper mine. It has been operated by Freeport Indonesia since 1973, a subsidiary of the US-owned Freeport McMoran Copper and Gold. The mine dumps waste in the deltas and rivers, destroying food sources and degrading the environment. Military and police oppression, kidnapping, torture and surveillance of religious and local leaders are all attempts to contain any protests or demands for self-rule. The profits of mining are not channelled back into the province, where Papuans live in poverty in addition to dealing with Indonesian settlers from other islands.

In the national discourse, the province is seen as valuable to the country because of natural resources and biodiversity. However, Papuans who study and work in cities on the major island of Java face racial discrimination from both the general public and the police. In August of 2019, Papuan students in several cities protesting the 1962 agreement were accused of vandalising the Indonesian flag and were

arrested, sparking protests in West Papua demanding justice for the students, with banners saying “kami bukan monyet” (we are not monkeys) and social media hashtags, such as #papuabukanmonyet.

Demasking blackface

[...] all people are defined according to a set of terms that are constructed as mattering by those in positions of power or by those with investments in maintaining social hierarchies. To “see” “racial difference” is thus not to actually see differing bodies, but to see bodies as fundamentally marked by a particular way of viewing, with a particular emphasis on certain aspects of embodiment. (Riggs, 2008) What does it take to demask the harms of blackface and brownface, when they are often hidden under the guise of humour? The first step is to make the connections between what seems like ageless cultural traditions and transnational flows of conceptualised representations. What seems to have always been there needs to be situated in a historical context. Excavating the past may also reveal more of a history of progressive action and refusal of blackface and brownface.

Next is to understand that the performative use of blackface and brownface creates and reinforces racial hierarchies in a society. While in some contexts, brownface is used with reference to local dynamics while blackface to global dynamics, both build on each other and have a shared goal of dehumanisation, subordination and oppression in the service of larger economic ends. Finally, as culture is dynamic, it is always possible to create or bring back alternative performances that humanise historically marginalised peoples.

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New Hope for The Hague Challenged by the Legacies of Slavery from Within - a Reaction

Xavier Donker

On November 29th, 2019 an independent commission chaired by former The Hague commissioner Rabin Baldewsingh presented its findings before the The Hague commissioner responsible for social affairs Bert van Alphen, civil servants, other interested parties and individuals, in the prominent press centre Nieuwspoor. I was most happy to accept the invitation and bring along a guest. In December 2018, a motion appeared in The Hague city council calling for an “appropriate implementation of a slavery memorial”. Next, on February 19, 2019, The Hague’s city managers (commissioners and the mayor), in recognition of the motion, called for the creation of the independent commission which would be tasked with the exploration of the amount of public support for the creation of a monument, and to consult with various involved local communities and their respective organisations about a sound and feasible implementation for the memorial for (the abolishment of) slavery.

As a municipality among the four largest in the Netherlands, a colonial seat of power since the 16th century and perhaps most notably being known for its title of being the international centre for peace and justice, The Hague is late by the admission of the city council and the commission with this initiative. Fortunately, the city’s prominent role in the Dutch’s significant position among the European colonial powers that participated in the transatlantic slave trade is underscored in the motion. It lists the city’s contribution to the maintaining the economic sector, as well as the struggle for its abolition which played out in the colonial seat of power over a number of decades. 2002 saw the revelation of the national transatlantic slave trade monument in Amsterdam’s Oosterpark, designed by the Surinamese Erwin de Vries. In 2013 Rotterdam followed with a transatlantic slave trade monument situated in the historically significant Lloydkwartier, designed by the Angolan-Cape Verdean artist Alex da Silva. Regardless of the number of years between the preceding Dutch dedications and The Hague’s announcement of seriously exploring the possibility for its own memorial, the response to the main research question, as reported by the Chairman, was resoundingly positive. Residents and key figures with whom the commission consulted, very much welcome the creation of a slavery memorial to their city. What the research also yielded was very daring and bold suggestions for the location of the erection of a slavery monument, notably Plein, Lange Voorhout and the Paleistuin - all relics of The Hague’s colonial heyday.

Strides versus objections

The general reception of these results and any future move by the municipality towards physically realizing a monument is one to await with a degree of enthusiasm and uneasiness. Down from a sceptical outlook, I increasingly gravitated towards a fifty-fifty split during the course of the presentation. I deem the three sites as “bold” due to the somewhat expected eyebrow-raising reaction the erection of a slavery monument would cause. In effect, a memorial will garner national attention because of the city’s status. How could such magnificent grandeur be confused with a commemoration of the dark chapters of atrocities *foreign* to Dutch soil? Selective history, of which the Dutch Golden Age marketing has played a major role in the purportment of a clean image beyond Dutch borders, has resulted among in the minds of many in the absolution of the Netherlands from European imperialism and the atrocities committed against people of African descent. This has left us with the celebration of such sites for their economically rich histories. It is a shame that the term “bold” be even befitting here.

We are all the offspring, a result, of a shared history. In this legacy, innocence is still found among the and across offspring of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which in turn is reason to warrant the placement of a memorial in a prominent site in the city. The independent commission cites the significant emergence of a movement geared towards recognition and remembrance of the shared slavery past on Dutch soil, which coincides with the larger waves of migration from the former western colonies. The grassroots organisations and institutes such as NiNsee that have been spawned from this, actively demand the need for education of this shared past as for example, a way to combat and offset the ensuing phenomenon of disconnect between the “European” Dutch and their Caribbean brothers and sisters, as well as fellow residents, on the significant societal impact of the slave trade. We hope that, with this, inattentiveness underlying Dutch societal issues on race will be addressed from another angle. The expected eyebrow-raising is a result of a feeling of infringement on “Dutchness”, as The Hague is a major centre of cultural and economic heritage. Relics found in the city centre and surrounding districts such as the decadent Mauritshuis, found on the Hofvijver and adjacent to the Binnenhof complex and other colonial era residences that line the stately Lange Voorhout are tangible objects left

behind by prominent individuals, who made their mark through policy domestically in addition to their economic activities across the Atlantic Ocean. The history upon which the third major city of the Netherlands stands has afforded the country a prominent place on the world stage. To confront this glorified heritage is to taint Dutchness and the “moments of convivial togetherness” (Chauvin, Coenders & Koren, 2018: 5). As such, this confrontation threads into the paradox that the Surinamese Dutch anthropologist Wekker (2016: 1) describes in her seminal book. From the thesis of the book, it is understood that the, imperialist, tangible objects contribute to a national heritage – which is by default, white – while it may be denied as being the case.

Within a week after the presentation at Nieuwspoor, news outlets reported on December 5th a most disturbing incident in which city councilman of the populist Freedom Party Sebastian Kruis unapologetically used the Dutch equivalent to the N-word during a town hall debate the day before, despite the first voiced objection by NIDA party city councilman Cemil Yilmaz and call to order by the city hall Governance Commission Chair (De Jonge, 2019; Metro Nieuws, 2019). Councilman Kruis could however rely on his De Mos Group counterpart Arjen Dubbelaar, to trivialise the objection made and shock felt in the room by stating that “[expletive] is simply a Dutch word.”

The councilman detested the oversensitivity of the “beroepsgekwetsen”- a derogatory term issued by persons who are critical of activists and civil society in general to describe persons who they accuse of earning a living from (mainly subsidies) anti-racist advocacy - for the censorship and threat to the colonialist and mental slavery power structures that would allow offense to the expletive becoming a new liberal norm. In his defence, Kruis stated that he knows “many persons that are proud to be [expletive].” Additionally, he relies on his own African heritage as a justification for his language in a government space. Unfortunately, such claims are something that we endemically witness in the Dutch case. The phenomenon of dismissal and trivialisation when a person of African descent is identified as the one displaying little to no objection to prejudice and stereotype is something that we are very familiar with in classical and seminal racial studies literature. It should therefore not surprise us that among persons of African descent, if interviewed and posed the question what the significance of a transatlantic slavery monument is, some may have the tendency to categorise this as something that goes against the established order. In navigating through a society dominated by a white identity and where nativism is increasingly common, such adverse public reactions are learned as coping mechanisms. An example of this is once again evidenced in the promotion and results of the sixth Black Pete study, conducted by the Dutch news programme EenVandaag (Klapwijk, 2019).

Conclusions

The city hall incident is a classic case of such tendencies the legacy of slavery has left us to grapple with – and more. How can it be that this incident occurred within the same municipality, that a week before, ambitiously set out bring about (increased) awareness to its 539,040 residents? Is this really The Hague, that global beacon of justice for the world? Are triumphant steps calling for a (national) recognition of the Dutch Golden Age’s faults to be immediately followed by influential voices of ignorance as witnessed on December 4th, 2019?

In my view, xenophobic and colonialist minds have been deeply upset by the unwavering resilience displayed by civil society despite the gain populism has made across Europe. The attitude and disgust expressed by the Freedom Party and De Mos Group point towards fragility among the xenophobes. The town hall, in this regard, is not an entirely safe space for the liberal as they are faced with rebellious scare tactics aimed at discouraging their work.

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“Zwarte Piet is just a symptom”: The Kick Out Zwarte Piet Campaign in Den Haag

Mariam El Maslouhi, as told to Bel Parnell-Berry

For me, Zwarte Piet stands for the emancipation movement of black people and people of colour in the Netherlands, so it is something that I've been working towards every year for the last four years – for two years now in Den Haag, specifically. After the 5th December, it doesn't end for us. The Netherlands always has this tolerant idea of: “We are *beyond* race. Zwarte Piet is not racist, because we do not see colour.” People feel so threatened and attached to Zwarte Piet because it's a bunch of people of colour telling them, “You know what? We really don't care about your tradition. It has to change!” It is always this way in any country where there is an emancipation movement; Zwarte Piet is just a symptom. It could have been anything else.

If you look at the last 15 years in the Netherlands, the Islamophobia and the “Moroccan problem”, a climate has been made that this whole pro-Zwarte Piet stance can thrive. How many times have we seen on TV they have been basically talking about ethnic profiling like, “Well, it's just a part of the job of the police”? That's why, for almost eight years when you look at public opinion or what journalists have been writing about the activists from Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP), it's been horrible! They have this free card because they've already been doing it about Muslims as terrorists and Moroccans as criminals. Then it's very easy to attack people of colour and to call them names.

Nevertheless, the police were really afraid to make the same mistakes as last year, where they wouldn't let us demonstrate in Den Haag. So, they got a lot of criticism, also from Amnesty International and as Den Haag, the city of peace and justice. There were so many police that even the 100s of pro-Piet demonstrators standing on the Herengracht couldn't get to us.

I think I was shocked in 2018. To me, demonstrating is a basic right. Why do I have to tell the police? The mayor said one location, the police gave us three options, so it was very messy. I just said, “Let's just meet at Malieveld and go together wherever we're going to march”, which was very naïve of me. I had no idea the demonstration rights in Den Haag was something debatable, something negotiable. I'm never going to take the right to demonstrate for granted ever again.

I told KOZP last year that the focus needs to be on Den Haag, because if a city like this - with its demographic and with its diversity - can't solve this, how are you going to do it in smaller towns and villages? If Den Haag doesn't fall, you're not going to get that domino effect that you had for a little while with Amsterdam, Utrecht and Rotterdam. Now, Eindhoven can hide behind Den Haag and say: “Look at that city of peace and justice. A bigger city doesn't do it, so why should we?” Then you had Apeldoorn, where the national *intocht* was, which was funny because they didn't have a horse. They didn't have a boat. They had a train and then they made up this whole story about how Sinterklaas came and the horse was sick. However, you can't do that for Zwarte Piet, you know! We can't use our fantasies on this in this mythical story.

We sent letters to sponsors, because at one point we realised the municipality were not going to do much anymore. The motion from last year to ban Zwarte Piet was voted down because very so-called left-wing parties voted against it. Some of the sponsors said: “No, no, no! We're not going to do this anymore”. They were bigger companies that were afraid of their image. On the other hand, there were also daycares that told us: “We want to and we tried last year, but parents really got upset with us and they told us not to do it, or they were going to take all the kids out of the daycare”.

I had no idea it was so deep in Den Haag! I thought in Den Haag they're going to be more mature about it. It's an international city! But my God, I had no idea that there was this group in Scheveningen and Duindorp that is so white supremacist. I had no idea that they could organise so quickly and just be a real threat, like in 2018. In 2019, they have outdone themselves with attacking us while we had a meeting. I got death threats. When I was walking away from work, someone walked up to me and said “You, with all your propaganda!” So they very quickly knew who I was and where I work. The funny thing is there's a switch now, where the threat doesn't come from us. There was never a real, violent threat from us, but it is now coming from all those concerned parents who are threatening schools and teachers, and really being these vigilantes trying to protect this tradition. This stagnates what the KOZP movement is for and what the municipality actually wants.

Politically, I think there's going to be a lot of talks with the parade organiser and that it's going to take about three years before Den Haag is clear of Zwarte Piet, and even then you can't stop a private bakery from hanging up a Zwarte Piet in their window. What you can control is all the government-subsidised institutions, such as pools and libraries. To me, it's very annoying when they have the discussion and say "Oh, but it hurts people!" No! It's more than that! The reason why we're taking years and years to get rid of it means it is institutionalised. It makes me think of the abuse towards the footballer, Ahmad Mendes Moreira, which occurred on the same day that pro-Piet protestors were throwing eggs and fireworks at anti-Zwarte Piet protesters. If at that moment, you make a statement against racism and you don't mention that on the same day anti-Zwarte Piet campaigners were being beaten up and Mendes Moreira was being called Piet without making a correlation, then it's an empty statement.

The Afro Student Association Against on Campus Racism in Den Haag

Levi Ommen, as told to Bel Parnell-Berry

Zwarte Piet is probably the most visible form of institutional racism that we have in the Netherlands. Right now, you see the changes happening and people are getting super angry about it, and are actually holding onto Zwarte Piet even more than they were before. People are going to extremes to protect their culture and traditions. If you go to the south or to the north of the country (e.g. Friesland and Limburg) there are people who are willing to have the conversation, but there are not enough people who can speak up against racism in those areas. In Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and their respective surrounding areas, you can see a shift in attitudes towards Zwarte Piet, but Den Haag is a special case. At the University of Leiden's Den Haag campus, we believe that we need to do something about racism in general. We had some last-minute meetings with Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP), which also led to the cancellation of our event because of security reasons.

The Afro Student Association (ASA) wanted to do a panel discussion with Mariam Elmaslouhi, Mitchell Esajas and Tirsa With to talk more about their anti-Zwarte Piet activism and how it's framed within Dutch society - because anti-Zwarte Piet activists are not seen as activists. They're seen almost as terrorists, or as a danger to society. There's a switch happening right now, especially since the pro-Zwarte Piet people are starting to get really violent. People are seeing that actually, the anti-Zwarte Piet people are not that bad, but before that switch we were seen as almost anti-state. Thus, we wanted to have a discussion about that. ASA had informed the faculty three weeks before the event, just in case they wanted to take security measures. Then approximately one week before the event, someone from the university said, "We wanted to move your event to a new location that is easier to secure. That way we can also see who comes in and out in case something happens".

I was there as one of the panellists for the KOZP conference in Den Haag on the 8th November, when it was violently attacked by pro-Piet hooligans with fireworks. They smashed windows and cars – it was scary! It's really organised violence. It's terrorism – it's against the law. At this point, I believe it's not even about Zwarte Piet anymore. It's just about the fact that they are racist in general, and this is a good way to let it out. They wanted to beat us up anyway, but they didn't have a good enough reason to.

The day after the KOZP conference, I was called again by the university and they told me they were going to talk to the police. The board of the university eventually decided that only University of Leiden students and personnel could attend the ASA's event. I said, we have a lot of ASA members (alumni and allies) who are not a part of the university. The university board said they could not accept that and that they had made their decision. It was a top-down decision. This meant that people had one day to register for the event, and that the police would arrest people if they refused to leave the campus. It was a whole mess. Therefore, the ASA board decided they wouldn't go through with the event.

There are so many politicians who are protecting systemic, fundamentalist racism in the Netherlands. Prime Minister Mark Rutte's "act normal or go away" is something that is often to immigrants and to people of a "non-Dutch" (read: non-white) background. It's like "go back to your own country". The moment we (people of colour) say something and people don't like it, the comment that we get is "go back to your own country", but you can't tell Dutch people to go back to their own country or go away. It's very disappointing that people who are also supposed to represent you, such as politicians, say such harsh stuff, which is hurting half of society. How are you using fallacies and not constructive argumentation? Also, in the Netherlands everything needs to be debatable and people like to believe we can talk about everything. However, they don't acknowledge the line between racism and being able to voice their opinion. That's something that you see a lot. People try to stay neutral in a debate that is not neutral. By staying neutral, you're choosing the side of the racist.

In five years, you'll never see a Zwarte Piet. My kids will only know about Zwarte Piet when they're teenagers and I tell them about what I used to do when I was 20. When we're done with Zwarte Piet, which is an institutional problem, there will still be more societal issues that need to change. Thus, activism is something I will probably do for the rest of my life.

Other Ways of Engaging with the Figure of Sinterklaas

Gloria Holwerda-Williams, as told to Archana Ramanujam

When I was still in the US, I had begun making some inroads towards making images that you see around the holidays. I began to make holiday cards featuring a black female Santa Claus, and that for me was the beginning of thinking about other ways of thinking about the Zwarte Piet figure, but also engaging with the figure of Sinterklaas as well. Sinterklaas or Santa Claus is generally played by white men predominantly because it is a Christian holiday. The figure of Santa Claus replaced a female character, because prior to the spread of Christianity, a lot of those Pagen rituals around the end of the year were focused on a female figure. In those times, they seemed to equate anything around change with being a woman, because of the ability to bear a child and to give birth, and I found it very interesting when I discovered that knowledge. I had just not been aware of it before.

A Sint You Want started here in about 2010 with our first performance in Amsterdam West. I'm an immigrant here and one of the first experiences I had when I came here was on a bike, going past the Concertgebouw. Some kid pointed to me, and said "Hee, Ma! Hee, hee - kijk daar is Zwarte Piet!"²² I stopped my bike, I looked at the kid and I looked at the mom and I just said to the mom, "Oh you need to correct that", and she looked embarrassed and then she said, "Nee, nee, nee. Zeg dat niet"²³, to her child.

I realised then that I did not know a figure of colour that was more known among white Dutch people than Zwarte Piet. It is very clearly a mocking imitation of people of colour, specifically black people. In the case of Holland, it seems particularly people from Suriname or the Dutch Antilles - anybody of colour, it seems, from the places the Dutch colonised are part and parcel of what this image is about. Basically, just blackface.

I got very tired of hearing, "Oh, you want to spoil the holiday. You want to end it!" No - I think Sinterklaas has wonderful elements for community that I think are underused because of the Zwarte Piet character. I think it does not allow the Dutch community, as a whole, to engage in this end of the year event.

I haven't been on the street with this character since 2010. Mostly I do it inside - in places where I would expect I'm welcome, because I have to be careful. People do react violently, at times, to my character. And, I have no intention of physically engaging with somebody while I'm dressed that way. I was often approached by white people who were taken aback, to say the least, and I had to say to them, "Change happens." A black woman Sinterklaas is not necessarily what it is going to be, but this is what it could be. Any time a black person puts on a suit that looks like Sinterklaas or Santa Claus, I think you're already doing something right there. It really is about getting people to think about it another way, and also to see what they hope for.

²² English translation: "Hey Ma! Hey, hey - look there's Black Pete!"

²³ English translation: "No, no, no. Don't say that."

The Protracted Renaming of Witte de With, and the Capability of Doing Better

Quinsy Gario

At the start of 2020, in the Dutch national newspapers De Volkskrant and NRC, space and time was given to discuss why the institution - that still insists on calling itself Witte De With Centre for Contemporary Art - is taking so long to change its name. There was an interview with director Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy in De Volkskrant and a column in NRC Handelsblad by Lotfi El Hamadi, and both have left me scratching my head in bewilderment²⁴.

To refresh your memory, this institution was named after the street that it's on in Rotterdam. That particular street was named in 1871. 1871 was the year that the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of Sumatra was signed in order to update the 1824 treaty between the two colonial empires. In 1810, the British had taken over Sumatra during the Napoleonic occupation of the Dutch empire, and therefore the 1824 treaty came into existence after Britain gave the Netherlands their plundered possessions back after the defeat of Napoleon. That 1824 treaty had, in the 50 years since, become a hindrance for the further economic development of both empires. In the 1871 treaty, Britain ceded control of Sumatra to the Netherlands and the Netherlands gave up its Dutch Gold Coast to the British. That is now part of what was re-named Ghana - just shy of 80 years later - after they fought and gained their independence from Britain in 1957. The 1871 treaty included the negotiation for the transfer of workers from British India to the colony of Suriname to work on the plantations. These so-called indentured workers would replace the formerly enslaved black plantation labourers, now that their additional 10 years of unpaid work - demanded in order to compensate plantation owners for the loss of their "property" - was coming to an end. The signing of this 1871 treaty was also directly responsible for the Aceh War that lasted from 1873 until 1904, and cost hundreds of thousands of lives because the Dutch annexed land as it expanded and tightened its grip on what was renamed Indonesia, after its independence from the Netherlands in 1945.

This short and simplified rundown of the historical moment in time when the street was named is important, because in the discussions about the name of the art institution that still insists on calling itself Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, this seems to fall by the wayside. In the insistence on the here and now, the harm done in the past – as well as the way it is still reverberating in the ways in which we move about cities like Rotterdam and countries like the Netherlands - is wilfully forgotten. There is, of course, a danger to look back in time and pinpoint connections between events because it then presupposes a direct correlation where there might not be one. However, this street being named after a Dutch naval commander can't not be connected to the simultaneous violent annexation of that same region that the naval commander helped to exploit when he served both in the Dutch East India Company and the Dutch West India Company. It can't not be connected to a campaign of nation building in the Netherlands that was predicated on justifying, celebrating and making opaque the subjugation of people and ecological destruction elsewhere. Moreover, the ignorant adoption of this street name 119 years later, for a contemporary art institution, can't not be connected to the European art world's inextricable ties to the whitewashing of colonial ecological destruction, resource theft and dehumanising displacement.

Thus, the headline of the interview with Hernández Chong Cuy, "Kunstcentrum Witte de With zou zijn naam veranderen, maar heet nog steeds Witte de With", seemed to insinuate that the interview would contain a resolve of the slowness of changing the name; that the sole prompt of the interview would be to properly discuss the severity of the situation. However, as you continue to read the interview, it slowly dawns on you that it's actually an interview to promote a talk by Ken Lum. Instead of the interview being about the art practice of Lum and its importance, we instead get a journalist who is trying to figure out what's going on with the name of the institution. One the one hand you can fault the journalist for pushing Lum's work to the sidelines, but on the other hand you can't because Hernández Chong Cuy is now two-thirds into her first of a maximum of two terms as director, and came in with the mandate to change the name of the institute. The interview was published on the 14th January 2020, while Hernández

²⁴ An updated version of this essay was published on the *Dipsaus* blog after the "Witte de With" building was defaced by Black Lives Matter protestors in June 2020. <https://www.dipsaus.org/exclusives-posts/2020/6/13/the-protracted-renaming-of-witte-de-with-and-the-capability-of-doing-better>

Chong Cuy became director on the 1st January 2018. The board of the institution announced in September 2017 that it would change its name after an open letter was published in June 2017 as a result of the institute's response to a discussion that was started in February 2017 by writer and cultural critic Egbert Alejandro Martina.

Why have there been, now at the time of this publication close to two and half years after the board acquiesced to change the name of the institution, no more public steps taken towards this? What could be more important than to at least symbolically attend to the concerns of those who have been and continue to be harmed by Dutch colonial exploitation? By not celebrating one of the key figures of that horrendous endeavour in the preservation of his name on the facade of the building, their website, their press releases, their letter-head, their social media accounts, their international collaborations, etc.? Why is the powerful reparative pedagogy inherent within such a gesture of recognition and institutional atonement, not being understood by an art institution that publicly states its residence in a former school informs their institutionality?

In the interview, Hernández Chong Cuy says that behind the scenes she's been implementing a different way of working within the organisation. One of the first things was the founding of a fellowship program for 16 to 23-year-olds. The first cohort was tasked with transforming one of the gallery spaces into a multi-purpose space. For six months, the ground floor gallery space operated under the name "Untitled" to then later be named Melly, referencing Ken Lum's 30-year-old iconic billboard on the side of the building. What is troubling is that the work behind the scenes feels like a stalling tactic for the work that needs to be done in relation to the outside of it. It's as if the institution is arguing that the harm being done by the institution is first and foremost being done to its employees. As if after pointing out the discrepancy, between the wish to facilitate important decolonial and postcolonial conversations and the moniker under which that is being done, it is the working conditions or administrative structure of the institution that now needs to be prioritised over the outward violence that discrepancy continues and obscures. It is the reiteration of a hierarchy in which the awareness, of the colonial violence the institution is wrapping itself in, is now used to better the institution itself before it deals with the harm that it is perpetrating outside itself. In other words, the continued harm done to Black and Asian bodies is now being used to educate a White institution, and that runs counter to the intentions stated by the institution. If the gallery space transformed by the fellows could be named and operated under the moniker "Untitled" for six months, what's keeping the institution from implementing that same strategy for itself as it figures out its next steps?

After the institutional acknowledgment of the colonial violence perpetrated by the figure it is named after, and during the period in which the street was named after him, it seems as if there is no feeling, in the literal term, of what it means to come to grips with what the institution has now been doing for 30 years. The name change seems to institutionally be experienced as if it is simply a superficial exercise of virtue signalling; something that is done to and for the outside, but has no bearing on their bodily experiences of the space. This implies a complete lack of solidarity with those who do sense the horror that is being venerated through its institutional practice of doing critical and insightful work under the banner of Witte de With. This cog in the wheel of the then burgeoning and now anchored systematic and continued practice of capitalist exploitation, human degradation and ecological destruction in the Global South. Why are people being told to wait because the institution is cheekily "staying with the trouble"? It's offensively staying there to the detriment of people other than themselves, and being ignorant of that seems to run counter to what they have stated they want to do. It is an appalling signalling of an inattentiveness and indifference to what it means to be confronted with symbols like these on a daily basis, and experiencing what they signify for your existence when you have a violent colonial link to the Netherlands. Moreover, that also seems to run counter to the stated values of the organisation that employs people who I do hold in high regard.

The rather off putting interview with Hernández Chong Cuy was followed five days later by a rather weird column in NRC Handelsblad by Lotfi El Hamadi on January 19th. I write this as an appreciator of El Hamadi's work while all the while knowing that he's there to counterbalance the racist rubbish that is published in that paper under the banner of platforming a plurality of voices. He's there because he's a good writer, but also to give the paper a semblance of neutrality. When reading columns in national newspapers, it's good to remember that even the most progressive voices have been picked by an editor or editorial board that also picked racist voices. In that regard, this column then reminded me less of El Hamadi's strongest work and more of another NRC columnist who consistently falsely presents two sides of a struggle as equally extreme, only to then conclude an opinion that positions the columnist

as a sensible moderate. However, that positioning is actually a self-unmasking of bad and boring bourgeois politics that nobody should be boasting about having. In the Netherlands that columnist, to my befuddlement, is consistently awarded prizes and has lately been surrounding himself with up and coming writers of colour who are now seemingly adopting his politics and style, to the detriment of their own voices and insights. This column by El Hamadi is one of the latest head-scratchingly painful illustrations of the adoption of that *both-side-ism*, usually perpetrated by the other columnist I refer to.

El Hamadi posits that those who call attention to the violence inherent in the name of the art institute are just as bad as the ones who want to keep the name. Mind you, he is saying this as somebody who intimately knows the local context of Rotterdam. This is the city that brought forth the political revolution that is *Leefbaar*, which espouses racist and Islamophobic policies and that catapulted the late Pim Fortuyn to national prominence. Fortuyn is the one who ushered in an unrelenting verbal, political, cultural and social attack on Muslims in the country, which has lasted for the past 20 years. Rotterdam is the city in which one alderwoman once proposed to force pregnant Black teenagers of Caribbean descent to have an abortion, and another alderman proposed and implemented a plan to force certain groups of women to take birth control. That latter politician is now our national minister of health - Hugo de Jonge. This is the city that first introduced stop-and-frisk into the country, and two years ago unveiled a plan to strip people of their clothes if they could not provide the receipts of where they bought those clothes when stopped by the police. It's the city where the council of aldermen proposed to demolish 20,000 public housing units and then people turned around and blamed the lack of affordable housing on asylum seekers. It's the city that has introduced a law that prohibits people from living in certain areas if their incomes are below a certain amount; that law is now being adopted by several other cities throughout the country. This is the city that is majority "minority", but you wouldn't know that when looking at the overwhelming whiteness of the boards of companies in the city, or those in power at the municipal level.

Furthermore, El Hamadi is saying that both sides of the issues surrounding the name of the street are equally to blame for the heightened tension. He's placing the outspoken racists who have been in power and are arguing that everything is being taken away from them on the same scale as the ones who are pointing out how harmful the continued veneration of a colonial figure and that period in time is. Just to be abundantly clear, that's rubbish and El Hamadi knows this because in other situations he has recognised this false equivalency and called it out. Then why would he do this with the little space that he's been afforded in a national newspaper, as a person of colour in a country that is institutionally hostile towards his existence? There is an absurdly uneven distribution of power along racial lines in this country because of its colonial history, and anybody telling you otherwise is bafflingly not paying attention and exhibiting a troubling unawareness when the situation at hand doesn't directly relate to their own experiences. Or they're trying to curry favour in a transparent attempt to belong to the echelon of the powerful. The noted false equivalency in this *both-side-ism* tinge of the column carries on over when El Hamadi notes that there is no immediate need to decolonise the street and the institution, because a diverse public now frequents that neighbourhood and has made it popular. By reiterating that argument just now, the absolute absurdity of publishing that preposterous take in a national newspaper becomes all the more disconcerting. Does El Hamadi really not understand the difference between the need to dismantle violent colonial infrastructure and the presence of people of diverse backgrounds who are forced into navigating that infrastructure for their survival? Those are two different things.

The column also contrasts the glacial pace of the institution's public reckoning with its name and what it stands for, with the development that the neighbourhood has gone through since the art institution opened its doors there. El Hamadi notes that it's changed significantly for what he deems is the better, and states that those who remember how it was before remember it as a place that you didn't go to if you didn't have to. What he hints at is that the art institution was able to move into what is now regarded as prime retail estate in 1990, because of the deplorable state of the neighbourhood, and that street in particular. Without saying it, he is making the connection between art, cultural entrepreneurship and gentrification. What's visible in the street is the arrival of a class of people who relate differently to the systematic neglect, marginalisation and stigmatisation by the local government, and what that does to the upkeep and investment in living conditions. The inclusion of various racial and ethnic backgrounds into that class of people does not erase the capitalist and white supremacist underpinnings of that gentrifying endeavour; this shouldn't be that difficult to grasp.

What the Hernández Chong Cuy interview and El Hamadi's column fail to do is actually engage with both the historical background of the naming and the open letter that was published calling for the institution to think about what it means for it to espouse critical thinking, as well as engender postcolonial and decolonial thinking while operating under the name of a commander in both the Dutch East India and Dutch West India Company. Both texts shy away from admitting that in the 30-year existence of the institution, there must have been others who voiced their opposition to how the name of the institution was white-washing colonial atrocities; others who were silenced or ignored, or both. What the interview and the column both attest to is the way in which there is now no way to not acknowledge the critique and reparative actions towards the harm of those on the outside of these institutions. Now we get to see how these institutions, and the people giving them ideological cover, attempt to either co-opt this push and espouse it as coming from within these institutions, or to normalise and thus obscure through de-politicisation the struggle that led to this moment in time. These are, in turn, tactics that are in full view in both the interview with the art institute director and the NRC column, of once again erasing the labour to led to this shift in attitudes and insights.

That these tactics are now so glaringly blatant is the result of the work done by the critical mass that has been calling for a reckoning with the normalisation of colonial violence in everyday life in the Netherlands. That work has reached another tipping point in a long line of struggles. It is the continued existence of ERIF and other grassroots organisations and collectives that are evidence of this shift in the ways in which institutions in the Netherlands are effectively being held accountable to their stated intentions. This concentration of power that rejects the universalising centre, but comes from a calling for justice has been significant in pushing otherwise static institutions out of their wilful ignorance and complacency. The report that you are reading is a reminder that we, you, Hernández Chong Cuy, El Hamadi and me, have the capability of doing better. And so, this is another call to the institution to do better, stop dragging its feet and change that awful name already.

Methodology

Approach and Techniques

The methodological approach for this longitudinal project consists of both online categorisation and analysis, and in-store observations, that were conducted between October and December 2019. While the observations made in-store do receive some analysis in the following chapter, this is not included in the quantitative data analysis. This longitudinal study continues to provide an ongoing dialogue between the Dutch anti-racism movement and the commercial sector, bolstered by rich qualitative observations and discourse, in addition to quantitative findings, to offer a commentary on the evolution of the Sinterklaas festival in spite of itself, in response to decolonial efforts.

While most of the results presented in the next chapter are based on analyses of products and advertisements from the specific stores this project usually follows year-on-year, some results also come from more general “neighbourhood” observations from across the Netherlands. Currently our study routinely assesses the products and advertisements from the following stores: Albert Heijn, Jumbo, HEMA, Blokker, Jamin, Ekoplaza, Intertoys, Kruidvat, Etos, XENOS, PLUS (new to the study in 2018) and Bol.com (online only). These stores were selected as they provide us with a broad cross-section of the Dutch market. Bol.com is included in the study as it is the Netherlands’ largest online marketplace. Stores formerly involved in the study Marqt and Bart Smit do not feature in this year’s report as Marqt did not have any online content to grade, and Bart Smit merged with Intertoys. In total, 467 products were analysed by the team resulting in a total of 489 grades, as certain products contained imagery that could be attributed more than one grade - especially when looking at Jumbo.

The online phase of the research took place over three stages where the team collected Sinterklaas-specific products²⁵ to review via the given store’s website. This part of the research is completed by an internal ERIF study team. In the second stage of the research where Bol.com is analysed, unlike with other stores (such as Albert Heijn or Blokker, where all Sinterklaas items available are reviewed), only the first 15 items²⁶ that come up on a “Sinterklaas” search, per category, are reviewed for the study. This is to provide a level of consistency between the categories and also to make the data collection and analysis of this phase management, due to the volume of products available via Bol.com. The categories used for the Bol.com selection are: music, DVDs, books, toys, puzzles & games, decorations, costumes and babies & toddlers.

In-store fieldwork - the third element of research - took place over several weeks and included a broader research team, who have been active throughout the Netherlands in over a dozen towns and cities (see Figure 1²⁷). In 2019, Sinterklaas products were also noted in a HEMA store located in Lille, France and in a Carrefour in the Brussels Zuid/Midi train station. In addition to reviewing Sinterklaas-specific products, the observation team paid close attention to how a store is decorated and how promotional displays were used to showcase seasonal products (i.e. either third party or home-brand). At times, data was collected in smaller neighbourhood stores as well as the main supermarkets that feature in the report.

The in-store fieldwork team captured anything that was easily accessible without disturbing other shoppers and/or staff, and refrained from drawing too much attention to themselves, which may have caused harm or expressions of hostility towards the fieldworkers. The fieldwork visits were scheduled around routine shopping trips in the locations that the various researchers live, work and/or visit on a regular basis. This way, researchers were familiar with their locations and the staff working there, and are less likely to cause disturbances or draw attention to themselves.

Based on the imagery captured in-store, comparisons with what we found online are presented in the next chapter of the report.

²⁵ By “Sinterklaas-specific” we mean products only usually sold, purchased and consumed during the Sinterklaas period (October - December) in the Netherlands; e.g. chocolate letters, *kruidnoten* and various forms of decorations and costumes.

²⁶ Exceptions are generally made for 16th and/or 17th items per categories, if said additional items are of specific interest and would offer more value to the research on the whole with their inclusion, although this differs between reports.

²⁷ A full list of all figures with captions can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 1



Analysis

ERIF currently uses 11 grades (see the table below²⁸) to categorise the various products and displays collected by the research team during online research as well as the imagery captured in store. The grades range from grade 1 (no visible references to the Piet character) to grade 8 (usage of imagery featuring a real, white person in blackface). The grades between 1 and 8 show a general movement towards more problematic versions of the Piet character, culminating in the use of racial stereotypes and blackface, although this is not to say the grades at the top of the table are entirely unproblematic. Changes to the order of the grades have been made as of this 2020 report, as shown below in the table. The graphs in the next chapter have been adjusted retrospectively to reflect this change.

Grade Code	Grade Description	Formerly
1	No Piet character visible on Sinterklaas specific product packaging or advertising.	n/a
2	Silhouette/shadow of a Piet-like figure on Sinterklaas specific product packaging or advertising.	n/a
2a	Piets presented as (cartoon) animals on Sinterklaas specific product packaging or advertising.	5a
3	White Piet (either real person or cartoon) with no face-paint of any kind on Sinterklaas specific product packaging or advertising.	n/a

²⁸ Images to illustrate the grades are offered in the next chapter as examples of how the grades are applied during in-store fieldwork. The same application is used for online products.

4	Multiple Piets portrayed by or as having (cartoon or real) any ethnicity (incl. white!), with no face paint of any kind, on Sinterklaas specific product packaging or advertising.	n/a
4a	Women (and/or female children), or man (or male child) of colour dressed up as Sint (real or cartoon).	n/a
5	White Piets (real or cartoon) with “sooty” faces on Sinterklaas specific product packaging or advertising.	5b
5a	Non-white Piets (real or cartoon) with “sooty” faces on Sinterklaas specific product packaging or advertising.	5d
6	Multi-coloured (with the use of face-paint) Piets (real or cartoon) on Sinterklaas specific product packaging or advertising.	5c
7	Real or cartoon Piets portrayed as having African features or as a person of African descent, with a traditional Piet costume and accompanied by no white Piets. Specifically for analysing cartoons, includes caricature references.	5 and 6
8	Real people only (i.e. in photographs) wearing blackface to portray Zwarte Piet, with exaggerated/stereotypical, racist features on Sinterklaas specific product packaging or advertising.	7

The analysis and write-up phase of the research (January to April 2020) took some time due to the complex and comparative nature of the project, but also due to the triggering nature of the reviewed content. The entire team takes time following the Sinterklaas period in order to recover from living through the season and following the racist discourses that erupt in the Netherlands around this topic each year, before coming back to the data and drafting the report.

Results of the 2019 Online and In-store Fieldwork

Introduction

Whilst the fieldwork for this report is usually collected between October and December based on the availability of products online and in-store, the first Sinterklaas items were spotted in major stores such as Albert Heijn, Jumbo and HEMA as early as the first week of September in 2019. Having said this, there was additional market competition as Halloween products were circulated in ever higher units in the middle of the Sinterklaas shopping period (i.e. throughout October). These products are comparable to those sold during the Sinterklaas season, since Halloween also revolves around the consumption of confectionery and includes costumes for children. Due to the gradual shift in the Dutch market towards promoting Halloween, during the 2019 fieldwork period, our in-store research team noted these items crowding out Sinterklaas products in stores such as XENOS until the start of November. XENOS then wasted no time at all ensuring that it promoted its Christmas stock as soon as Sinterklaas was over (see Figure 2), demonstrating clearly - from a commercial point of view - that the two festivals may as well be interchangeable.

Figure 2



In addition to Halloween, the in-store fieldworkers noticed a huge focus on Christmas products - often sold alongside Sinterklaas products - which has been climbing in recent years. For instance, in 2018 a Sinterklaas puppets were seen hanging in a Christmas tree in a HEMA, almost like a Santa Claus (see Figure 3, below), which makes sense considering both festive characters are reinterpretations of the same St. Nicholas. Moreover, during the 2019 online fieldwork period, a Santa Claus costume came up when “Sinterklaas” was entered into the search field of Blokker’s website. Certain Scandinavian stores, such as Flying Tiger and Sisters Green, only sold items for Christmas, offering no Sinterklaas products at all. Moreover, baby milestone cards by Benelux fashion chain C&A (which are included in a free gift box for expectant Dutch parents by Ouders van Nu), include a card for “Mij eerst Kerst” (“My first Christmas”), but not for a baby’s first Sinterklaas. This re-focusing towards the commercial appeals of Halloween and Christmas in the Dutch market demonstrates the importance of capital over so-called culture and/or tradition.

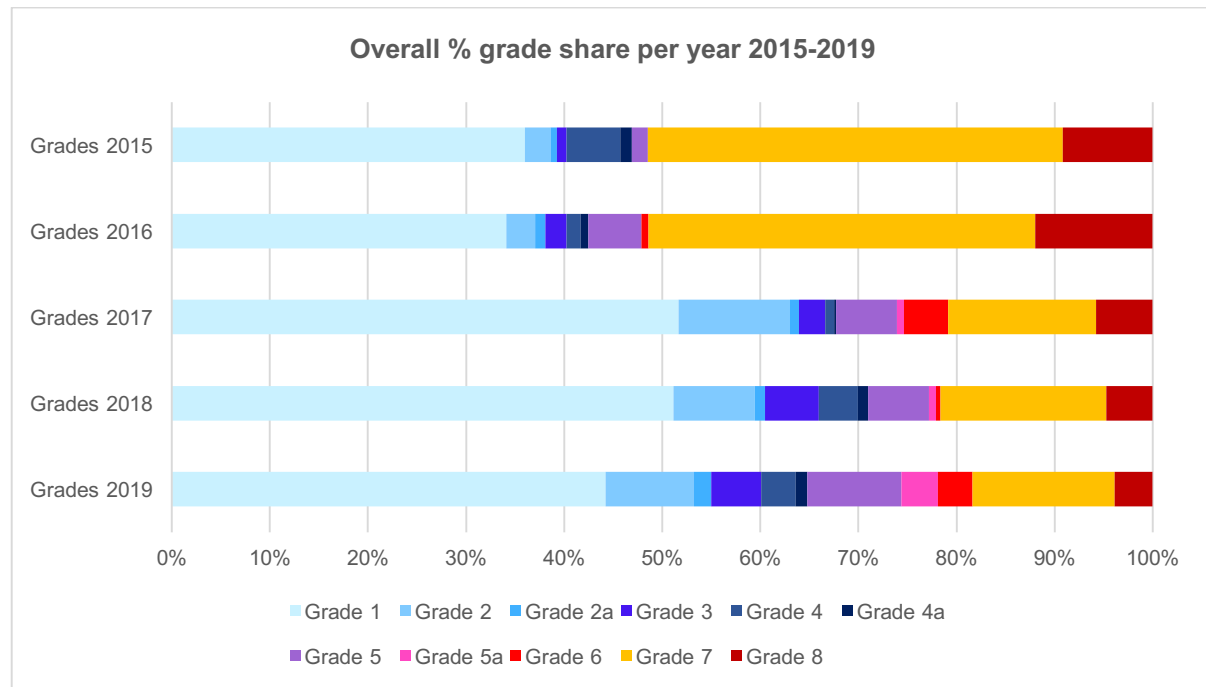
Figure 3



Changes between 2018 and 2019

The organic supermarket Marqt suffered several store closures throughout the country in 2019, and also offered no data via their website. Therefore, we have removed this shop from the study. Bart Smit has also been removed from the study as of 2019, since the toy store fully merged with Intertoys. The overall year-on-year comparison from 2015 to 2019 can be studied in Graph 1 below²⁹, which illustrates the grade split among Sinterklaas products each year the research has been carried out.

Graph 1



Products that could be graded 1 (very light blue, no Piet references) grew significantly in 2017, but shrank in 2019. In 2017 and 2018, grade 1 was attributed to over 50% of the products assessed; this is now down to 44.9% as of the 2019 fieldwork period. Meanwhile, grade 7 (yellow, portrayals of Zwarte Piet as a black person, including cartoons and caricatured imagery) was a dominant grade among products when the study started, but as the graph above shows, its share has been squeezed in more recent years. Despite violent, racist backlash towards the anti-Zwarte Piet movement, grade 8 (burgundy, real, white person photographed as Zwarte Piet in blackface) imagery on Sinterklaas products is also in gradual year-on-year decline - after peaking in 2016 - according to our figures. Certain grades (i.e. 2 to 6) indicate the ever-growing importance of new interpretations of the Piet character, such as sooty Piet (grades 5 and 5a, Pieten with various skin tones, lightly smeared by soot). These “middle grades” were expected to increase in 2019, and the results from the fieldwork reflect this outcome, especially grade 5 (previously 5b), which is used for *products* featuring a sooty white Piet (up from 6.2% to 9.4%). This result is in keeping with the new *Sinterklaas* myth that the Piet character is covered in soot. Grade 2 (red, a shadowy Piet figure or silhouette) also remains important (up from 8.3% to 9.2%), and continues to demonstrate a reluctance - on the part of stores and brands - to show the character's face and thereby enter into the *Zwarte Piet* debate explicitly. It also shows a strong market-based desire to keep the mystery and/or magic of the festival generally, and this character specifically, alive. Certain grades (4, 4a, 5 and 5a³⁰) interrogate the idea that a Piet might be characterised as being a person of colour, which we acknowledge is highly interpretive, given the fact that analyses in these cases is often based on cartoons.

The stores Ekoplaza and Jamin both had 100% grade 1 Sinterklaas products based on online research. On the other hand, grade 7 (which is now a combination of the previous grades 5 and 6³¹) holds firm,

²⁹ See Appendix B for a full overview of all graphs featured in the report.

³⁰ Grade 4 is imagery with multiple Pieten with numerous racial features (including white), but without any form of face paint; grade 4a is a Sinterklaas portrayed as either a woman (of any background), or a (black) man of colour. Grade 5 is white Pieten with soot marks; grade 5a is a black person, or person of colour, (drawn as) portraying a Piet with soot marks.

³¹ See the table in the Methodology chapter for more details.

especially for products in Plus, Blokker, Kruidvat, Intertoys and Bol.com. With regard to the specific products, grade 7 was continually used to assess *taai taai* cookies across shops and brands, where the cookie mould gives the Piet exaggerated “African” features, depicting a stereotype of a black person. Then again, grade 8 (previously 7 - see the Methodology chapter) continues its very slow decline (down from 4.7% to 4.1%), although products from Blokker and Bol.com continue to be assessed with this grade, as seen in previous years.

To pick up from last year’s report, both HEMA and Jumbo continued the trends expected. HEMA offered over 47% of its Sinterklaas at grade 1 and a further 43% at grades 5 and 5a. Jumbo on the other hand, uses imagery that can be assessed with eight out of a possible 11 separate grades, thus presenting a very confusing interpretation of Sinterklaas for another year. More on both stores follows in the next section.

Online versus in-store observations

Meanwhile, Etos - which continues to feature in our report - did not offer much data online, although they are known to promote the Sinterklaas season through their sale of children’s costumes, gift packages and through the usage of in-store decorations.

Moreover, we have noted difficulties when grading Sinterklaas books online, as most of the time it is not possible to see the back of the book or flip through the pages. Take for instance the Dutch classic *A Year in Holland with Jip and Janneke* by Annie M. G. Schmidt and Fiep Westendorp, which appears (from its front cover at least) to be a grade 1 product. It is only when you reach page 47 then you come across an image of Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet and realise that the book also contains grade 7 imagery. Making this important distinction is possible during in-store fieldwork, but not always online. The closest we can come to this is on the platform Bol.com, where it is now possible to flip over certain books to view the back as well.

Albert Heijn

Figure 4



As in previous years, more than half of Albert Heijn’s (AH) Sinterklaas products could be graded as 1, although other grades have begun to take up more of the share as of 2019. Grades 2 and 2a (i.e. Piet as a shadow/silhouette, or as an animal respectively) accounted for a quarter of products assessed at the supermarket chain. Products assessed at grade 7 were still available for purchase (over 7% according to online data), such as Koopmans *kruidnoten* and also *taai taai* products by both AH and Bolletje (see Graph 2 for more details).

Regarding in-store observations, grade 7 chocolate letters by Tosca were spotted in an AH store located in Amsterdam-Zuid (see Figure 5). There were also grade 7 chocolate Piet figurines and grade 7 AH *speculaas* sold in an Amsterdam-Noord, Molenwijk store. This store also sold grade 1 Delicata chocolate letters. Grade 7 dolls were used for decoration in a store in Arnhem.

Graph 2

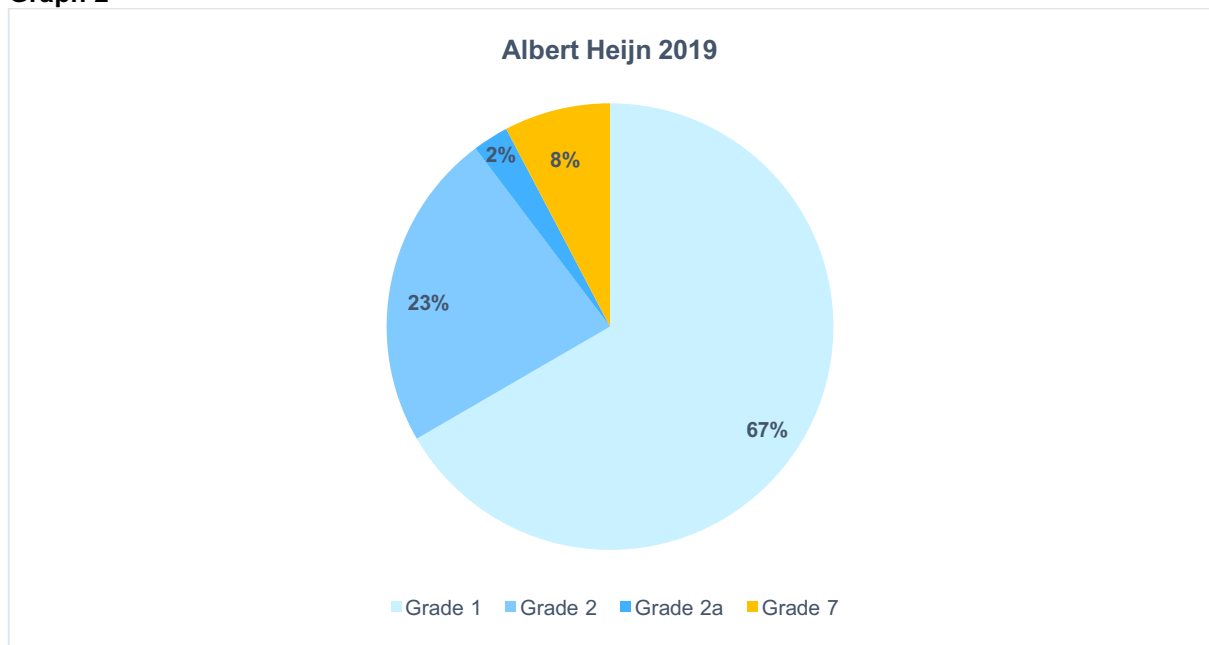


Figure 5



Meanwhile, grade 2 promotional displays were used in a Den Haag Farenheitstraat store, for example on and around Toney Chocoloney's products. In Den Haag (Escamp), grade 2 imagery was used on numerous AH products, as well as grade 2a with the use of the AH hamster mascot as the Sint and Piet characters (see Figure 6).

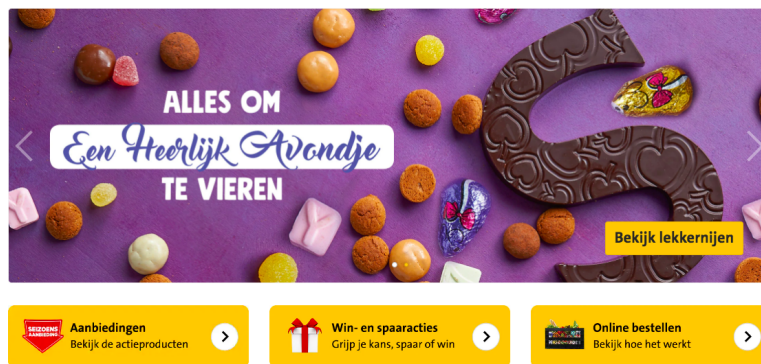
Figure 6



In Zwolle, grade 1 products by Bolletje (*kruidnoten*), Verkade (chocolate letters) and a variety of seasonal house-brand goods were spotted in-store, in addition to the grade 2a AH hamster mascots. Grade 7 chocolate figurines were also spotted in the Zwolle store. In a Rotterdam Keizerswaard store, grades 1 and 2 were used for promotional decorations that were seen during the Sinterklaas season. The store also sold house-brand *strooigoed* graded as 1, but as also seen in Amsterdam-Noord, the AH *speculaas* was grade 7.

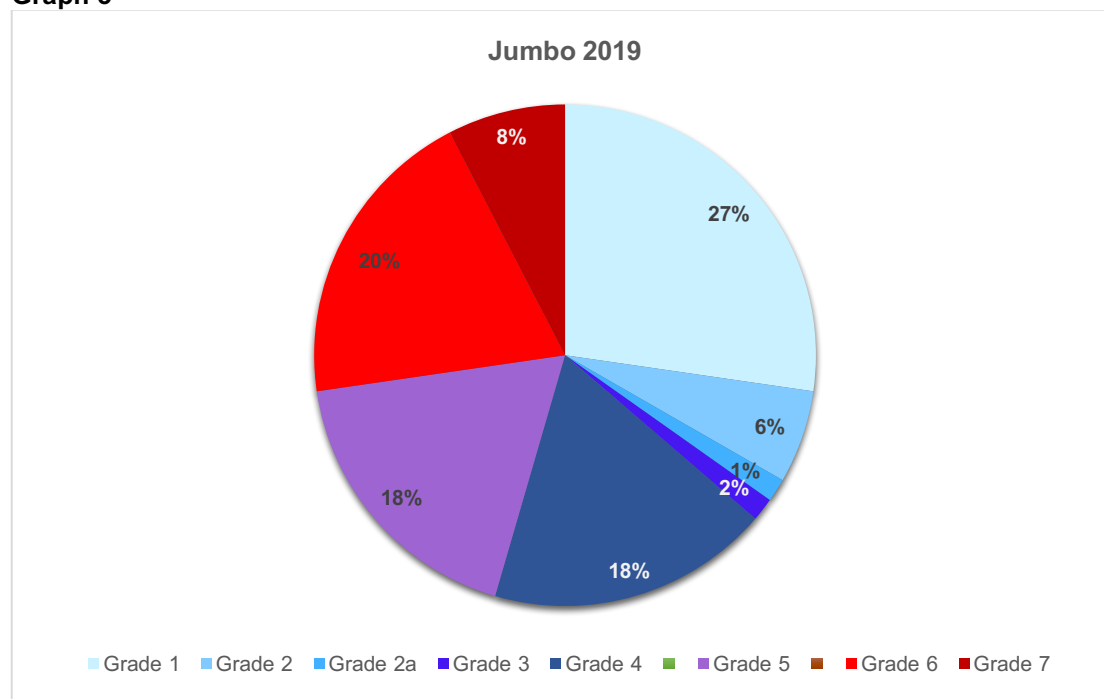
Jumbo

Figure 7



Jumbo continues to offer a very mixed bag as they struggle to define the Piet character in their branding (see Graph 3).

Graph 3



This is further complicated by other third-party brands offered in-store, as they also present conflicting versions of the controversial character. Grade 1 (no Piet references) gets the biggest share of the products according to our assessments, at 27.3%. Also, as with last year's data, we witnessed a variety of grades on the same product in certain cases, demonstrating a continued confusion regarding the Sinterklaas narrative, according to Jumbo. 31% of products from Jumbo were given a mix of grades by fieldworkers, i.e. mainly combinations of 4, 5 and 6 - all of which are attributed to Jumbo house-brand products.

Products with grades 4 (Piets portrayed as having various racial backgrounds), 5 (sooty Piets) and 6 (Piets with multi-coloured face paint) all approached 20% of share. Grade 7 products took 7.6% of the share at Jumbo, with products such as Bolletje *taai taai* and De Heer chocolate money notes, as well as Jumbo house-brand seasonal chocolate figurines. The grade 7 share is a significant decrease from 2018's figures (41%), even as Jumbo continues to offer a very conflicted and problematic depiction of the Sinterklaas narrative.

In terms of fieldwork conducted in-store across the Netherlands, both grades 5 and 7 Piets were used to decorate a Jumbo in Arnhem. The sale of multiple Piet costumes for children, using grade 8 imagery on the packaging, was also noted in the same store. Additionally from Arnhem, house-brand *kruidnoten* were sold with combinations of grades 4, 5 and 6 on packaging. Meanwhile in Zwolle (Stadshagen), various standard Sinterklaas products were sold, also featuring the grades 4, 5 and 6 combination. Confectionery brand Tosca made use of grade 7 imagery on chocolate, and a grade 2 Sinterklaas display by Verkade was visible in-store (see Figure 8).

Figure 8



Lastly, in-store fieldwork in Rotterdam (Keizerswaard) revealed the same combination of grades 4, 5 and 6 packaging as above. Also, grade 1 was used to assess products by Bolletje (chocolate *kruidnoten*) and La Place (chocolate letters).

PLUS

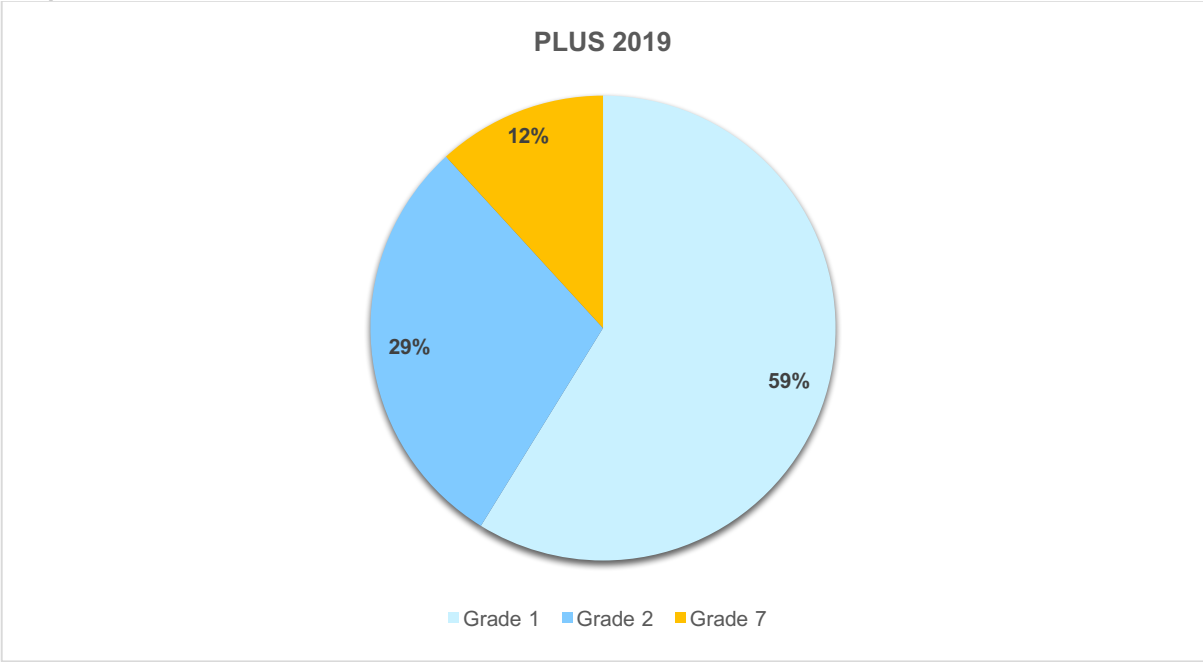
Figure 9



New to the study in last year's report, data collected online for PLUS' 2019 Sinterklaas products showed that over 50% contained no references to the Zwarte Piet character (grade 1). Moreover, over a quarter of products were assessed as grade 2, showing an overall distancing from the historical Zwarte Piet narrative for the majority of the store's products that were available online. On the other hand, the remaining 11.8% of products were graded as 7 unfortunately, which is more than double the 2018 data.

The products graded as 7 included PLUS house-brand as well as Bolletje *taai taai*. See Graph 4 for the grade/product split for PLUS.

Graph 4



In-store observations were undertaken in Olst, where grade 7 decorations were used in the local PLUS supermarket (see Figure 10).

Figure 10



Blokker

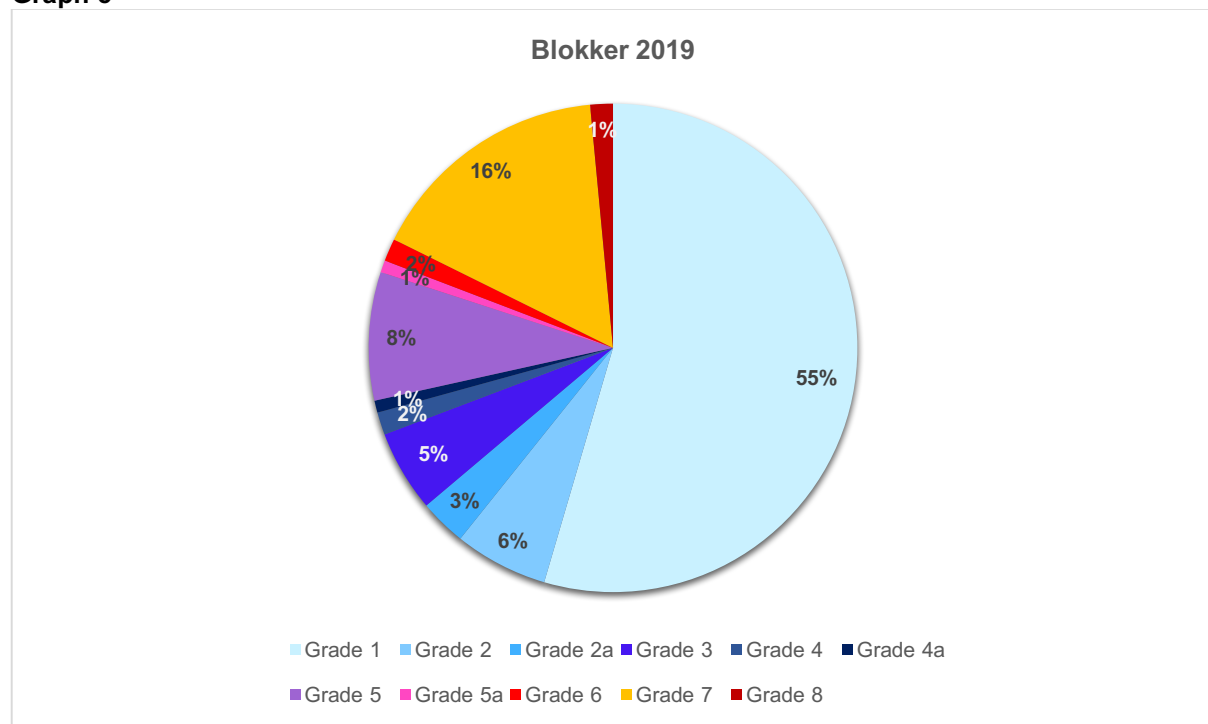
Figure 11



In 2019, we collected our largest number of grades via Blokker's website when compared to all other stores in the study, including Bol.com. As seen in previous reports, Blokker offers an assortment of variations when it comes to its portrayal of the Sinterklaas festival and, specifically, of Zwarte Piet. The share of products assessed at grade 1 is up from 44.5% in 2018 to 54.5% according to 2019 data. However, grades 7 and 8 (real, white people in blackface, photographed as Zwarte Piet) continue to take a share of the products, at 16.2% and 1.5% in 2019, respectively. Grade 5 has the second largest share of products behind grade 1, which is followed by grade 2 in turn.

Blokker's online products were - for the most part - from third-party companies and brands, which explains the broad range of grades gathered (see Graph 5), further illustrating the industry and nationwide conflict over how to depict Zwarte Piet, alongside telling a new Sinterklaas story. Having said this, overall Blokker's house-branding appeared to be consistently grade 5 based on online research.

Graph 5



In-store fieldwork was undertaken in a number of locations. In Harderwijk, grade 5 house-brand Sinterklaas imagery was visible from the outside of a Blokker store (see Figure 12).

In Den Haag (Leyweg), a grade 2 Verkade display for chocolate letters was viewed. The same display was also viewed in a store in Zwolle, as well as the same grade 5 house-brand Sinterklaas imagery as seen in Harderwijk. Furthermore, various seasonal products at grades 1, 2 and 5 products were sold in Zwolle.

Figure 12



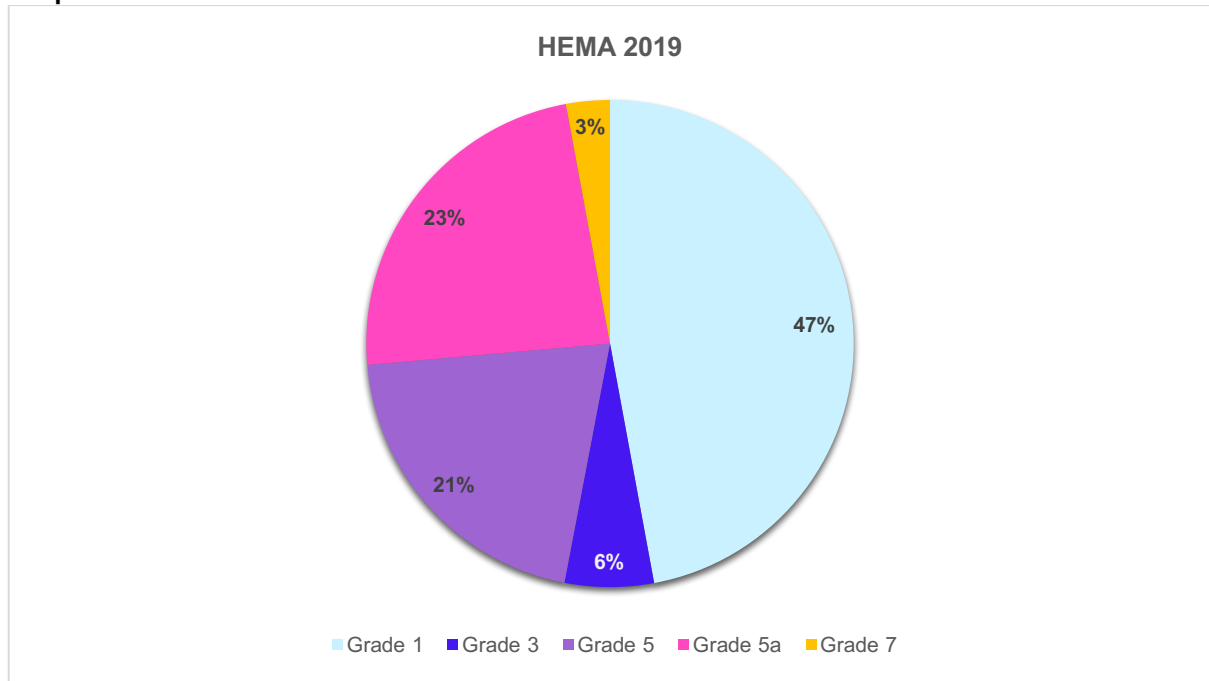
HEMA

Figure 13



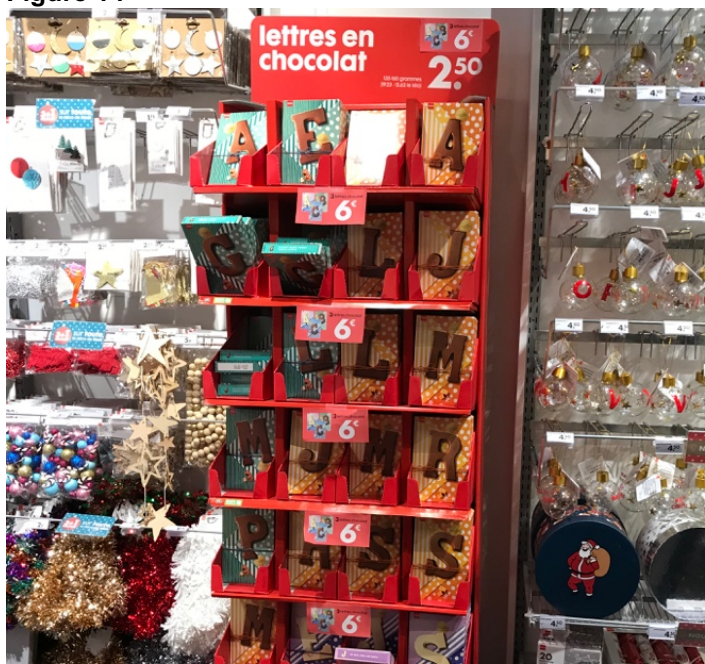
From online data collection, almost half of department store HEMA's Sinterklaas products were assessed at grade 1 (no Piet references, 47.1%), although in our previous report for the 2018 season, we had assessed up to 75% of products at this grade. A further 43% of products were split almost evenly between grades 5 (white Piet, with sooty patches) and 5a (Piet of colour, with sooty patches), demonstrating a redistribution of products containing Piet-related imagery at HEMA (see Graph 6). The only other grades used to assess products were 3 (white Pieten with no soot and/or face paint), especially for costume packaging, and 7 for products such as Piet-shaped *speculaas* cookies. Overall, the Sinterklaas branding at HEMA consistently featured Pieten either with or without soot marks, as well as shown to have both white and brown skin (underneath soot where relevant). This consistency in branding style and characterisation was also reported in our last report.

Graph 6



In-store observations gave similar results. By chance, a fieldworker found Sinterklaas products in a HEMA located in Lille, France. At this store, a grade 1 chocolate letter display was observed wedged between walls Christmas decorations for sale (see Figure 14).

Figure 14

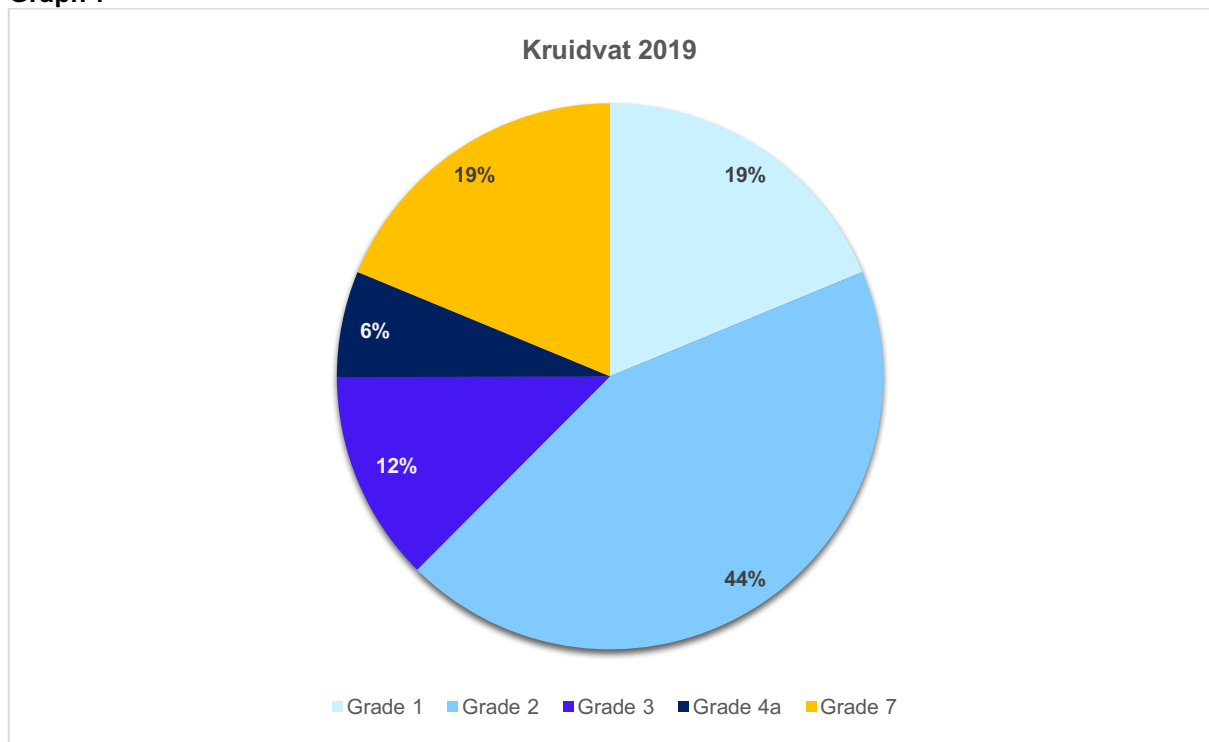


Meanwhile, grade 1 *pepernoten* and grade 5 Piet chocolate figurines were sold among Christmas Santa Claus items at the cashier counter. A similar sighting was made in Den Haag (Farenheitstraat), where *Sint* and Santa were displayed side-by-side in-store (see Figure 15).

Kruidvat

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Graph 7



Regarding in-store fieldwork, at a store in Den Haag (Escamp) grade 2 *kruidnoten* imagery was viewed, as well as chocolate letters. Additionally, grade 7 chocolate figurines were sold. All of the Sinterklaas products at this Den Haag Kruidvat were house-brand. On the other hand, grade 1 promotional displays for the Sinterklaas period were hung from the ceiling in a Zwolle store (see Figure 17).

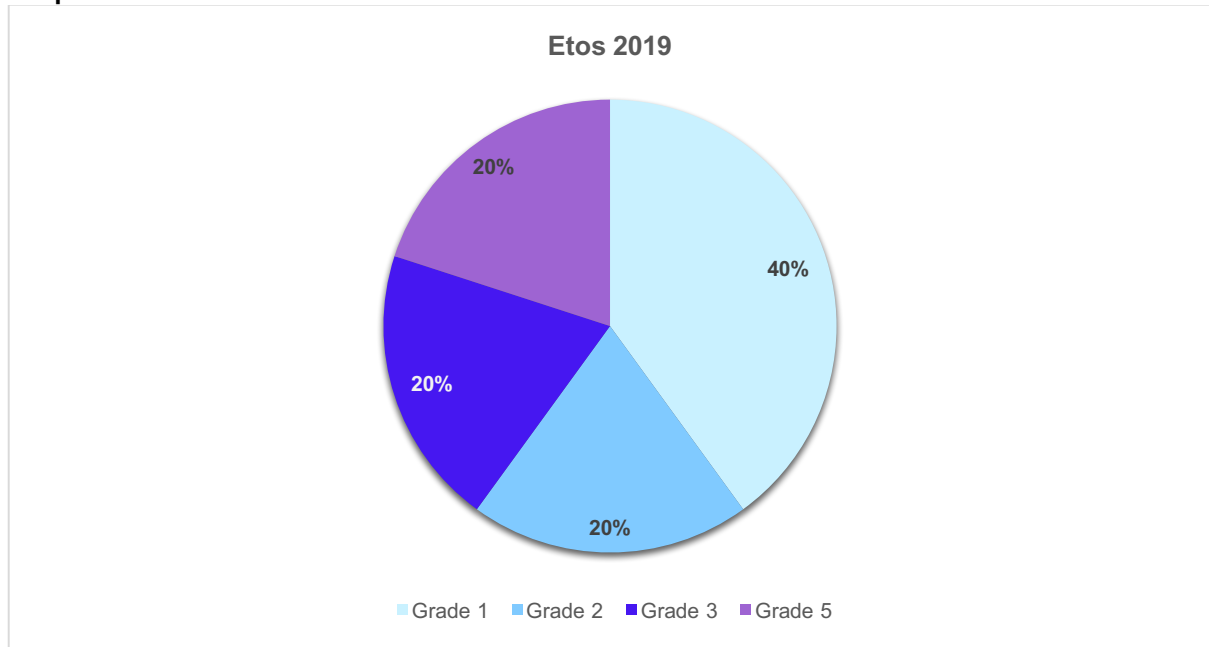
Figure 17



Etos

Health and beauty store Etos did not have a large amount of Sinterklaas-specific products available for grading online in 2019. Of the products that were available, they could be split among four grades, based on our analysis. As we have seen with other stores above, the largest share went to grade 1 (40%), while the remaining products were split equally between grades 2, 3 and 5 (20% each). Therefore, the products either featured no Piet character at all, or shadowy, white or sooty Piets. In other words, no black Piets were viewed via Etos in 2019 (see Graph 8).

Graph 8



In-store, the predominant Sinterklaas-related products observed were Piet costumes for children, which of course play a very important role in re-creating the image of the character specifically, and the storyline in general. Nonetheless, promotional material used in a Den Haag (Escamp) store showed grade 7 imagery.

XENOS

Figure 18



XENOS offered more of a mixed bag than some of the other stores already discussed. From online data collection, grade 5a (sooty Piet with slightly darker skin than other Piets and Sint) took the biggest share of products (34.6%). The difference in skin tone between these Piet characters and the Sint are emphasised when analysing honeycomb decorations, as shown in Figure 19 below (XENOS, 2020).

Figure 19



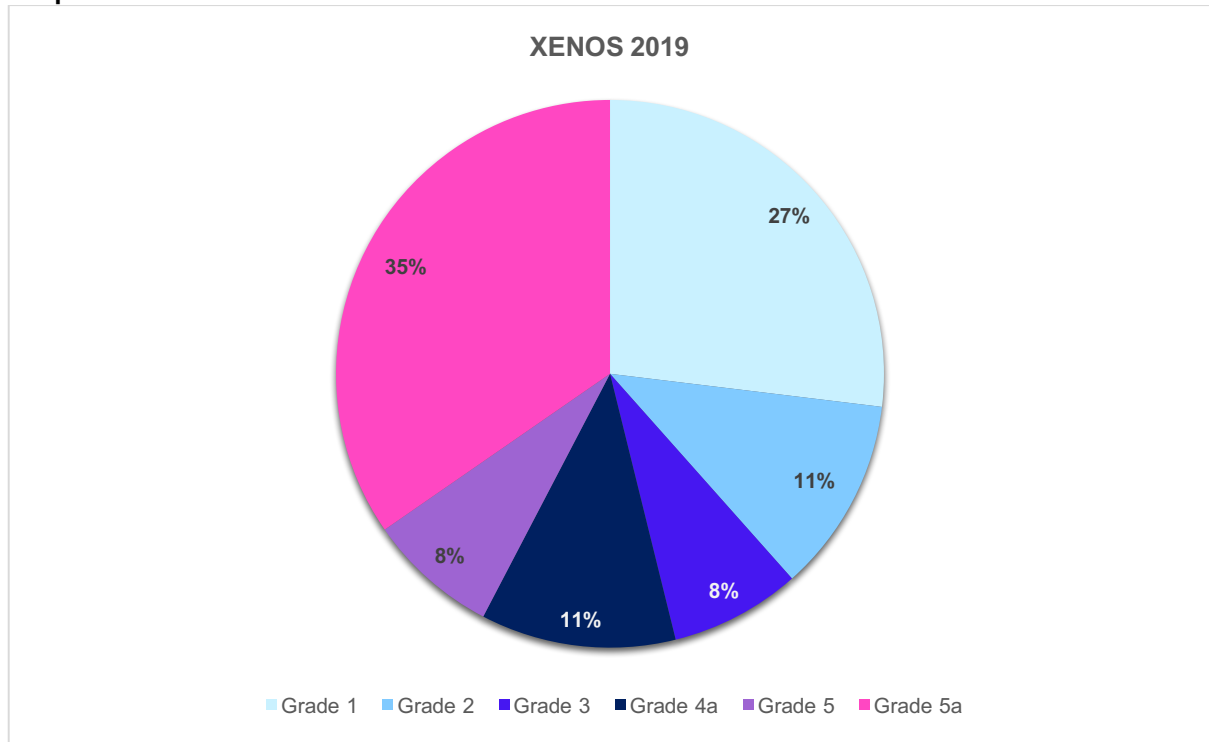
Furthermore, in-store fieldwork at a Den Haag (Grote Marktstraat) location revealed that in addition to the sooty Piets seen online being generally darker than the Sint character on Xenos products, additional seasonal products featured brown-skinned Piets with smudge marks (also graded as 5a, see Figure 20). Since in contrast to the Sint character, both Piets appear darker, it is arguable that both are racialised in juxtaposition to the Sint.

Figure 20



The next biggest share of online products at XENOS was graded at 1 (26.9%, see Graph 9).

Graph 9



In-store (Den Haag, Grotemarktstraat), there were various grade 1 Sinterklaas merchandise on display, as well as grade 5 costumes and also grade 7 candies. Meanwhile, in Rotterdam (Zuidplein), grade 7 boxes for Sinterklaas candy (to be placed inside shoes) were observed (see Figure 21).

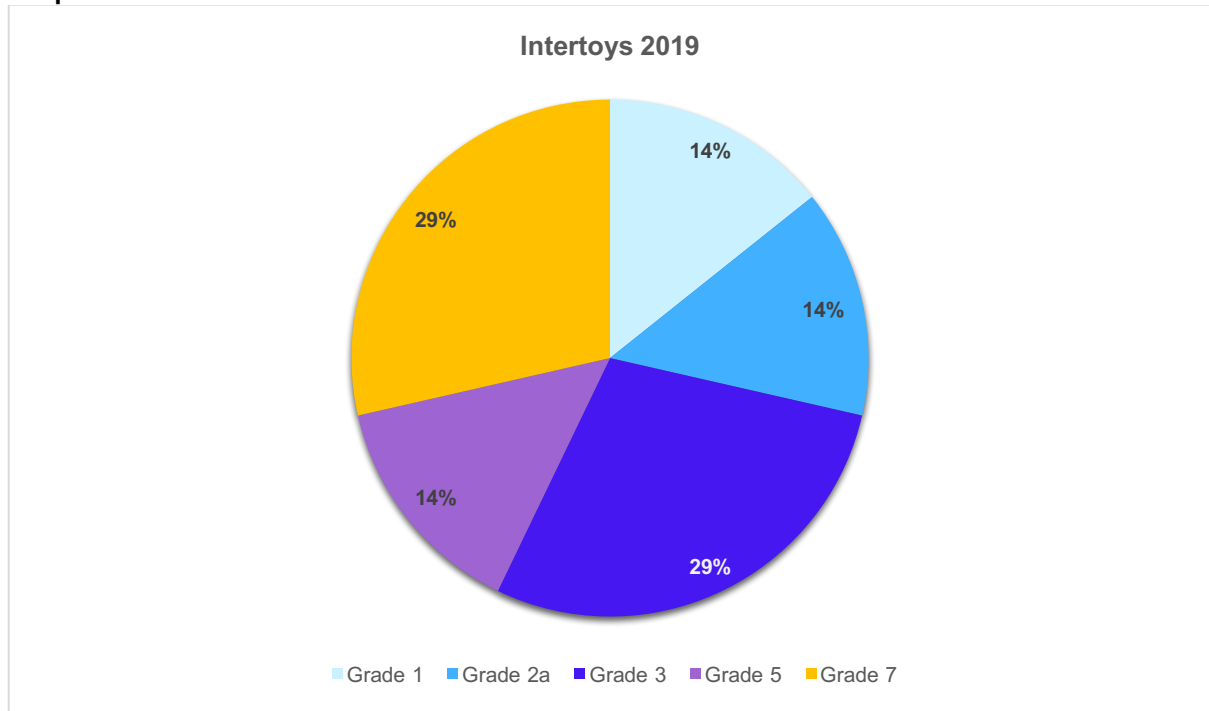
Figure 21



Intertoys

Grades 1 and 5, which are fairly prominently assigned to products at other stores in the study, only accounted for 14% of products each at Intertoys in 2019 - according to online research (see Graph 10).

Graph 10



On the other hand, grade 7 was assigned to more than a quarter of products (28.6%), showing the continued importance of associating Zwarte Piet with black people generally and caricatures of black people specifically for certain stakeholders of the festival. Moreover, grade 7 imagery was used on the labels of Piet costumes for children, as well as on the *juten zak* sold by the store, which is also strongly associated with the Zwarte Piet character. These results are similar to those reported for Intertoys in our last report, although online research did not result in assigning any products grade 8 in 2019. In 2018, 10% of Intertoys' online products were noted as grade 8 (real life white people in blackface as Zwarte Piet), arguably demonstrating a small improvement.

No in-store data was collected for Intertoys in 2019.

Ekoplaza

Figure 22



Based on online data, 100% of Ekoplaza's Sinterklaas products received a grade 1 in the 2019 season, which is the same result as last year. From in-store observations in Den Haag (Kerkplein), grade 3 (only white Piets) price labels were viewed for chocolate *kruidnoten* (see Figure 23).

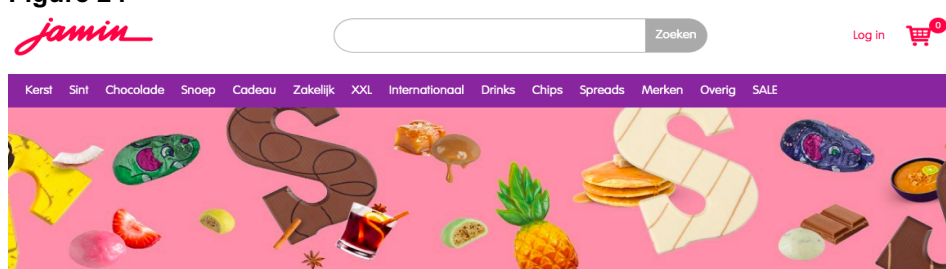
Figure 23



This labelling was noticed on a wide range of Sinterklaas products in the store. Meanwhile, grade 7 shaped *taai taai* were also sold, although with grade 3 packaging.

Jamin

Figure 24



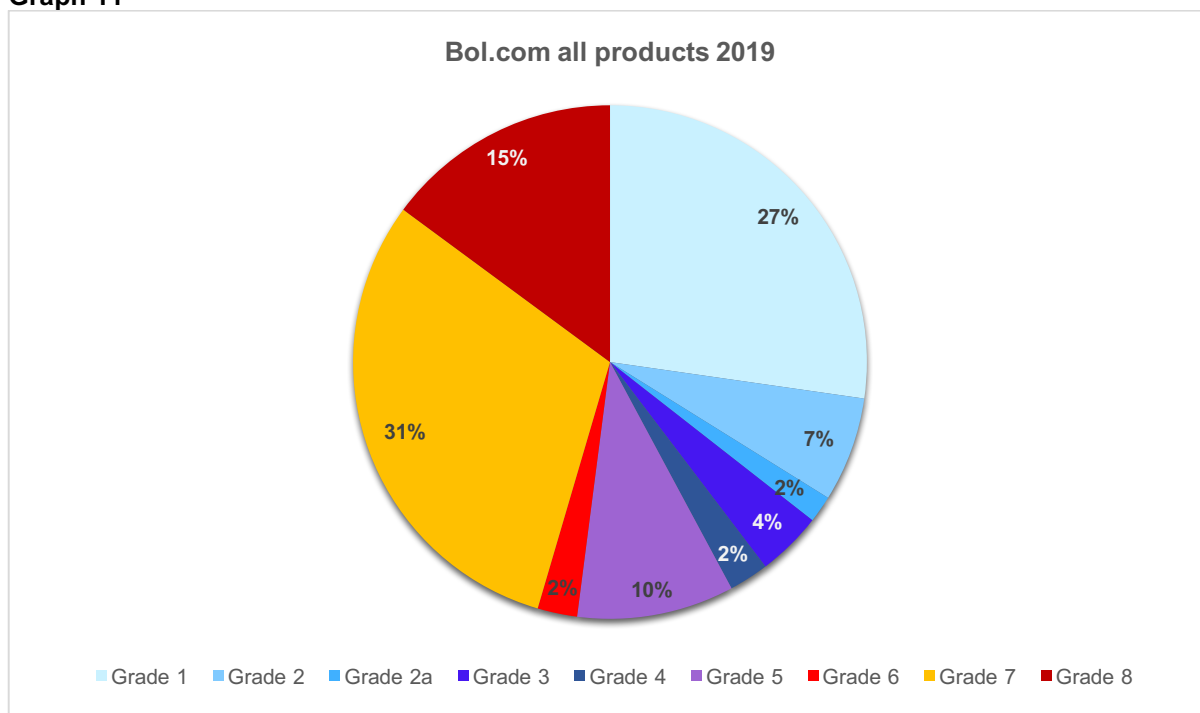
As with Ekoplaza above, 100% of Jamin's online products were graded as 1 according to online research in 2019, which is up from 97% as stated in last year's report. Moreover, like the other stores offering food products for the Sinterklaas season, Jamin offered a wide array of options, such as chocolate letters, *kruidnoten* and *speculaas*.

No in-store data was collected in 2019 for Jamin.

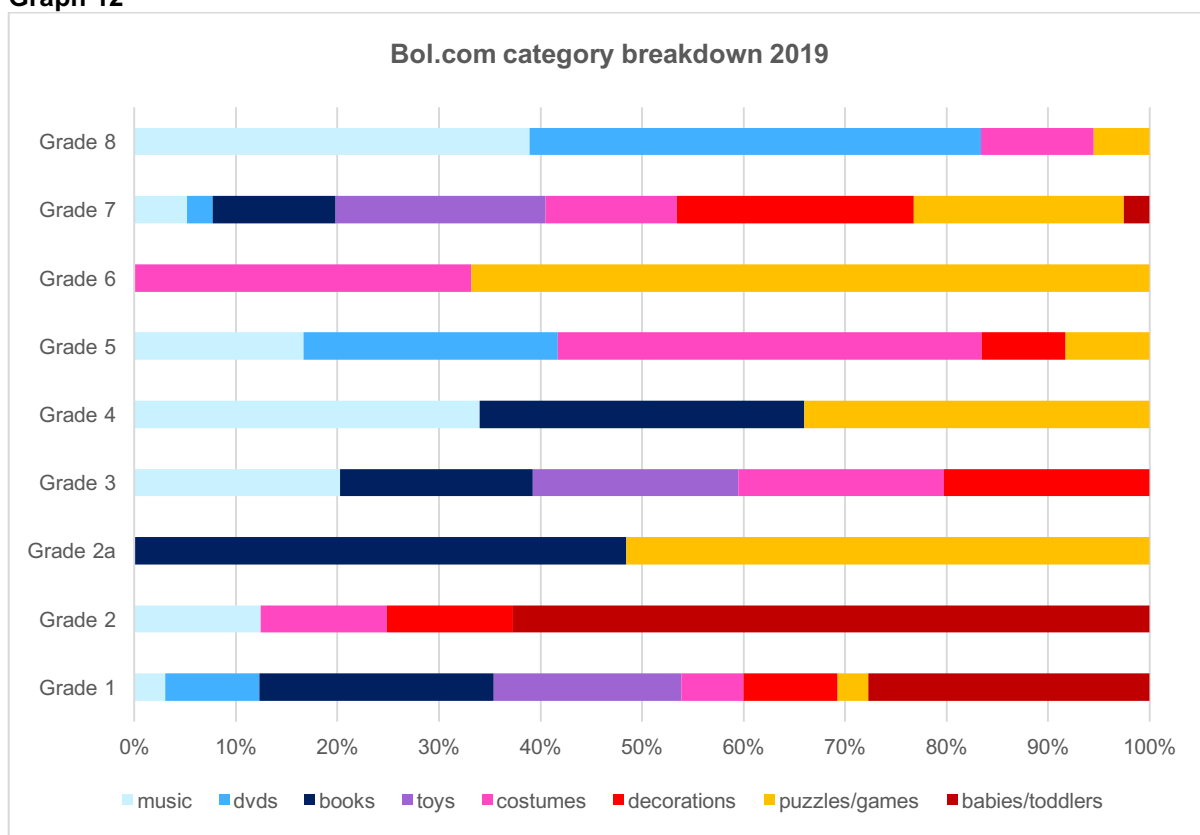
Bol.com

Overall, grades 1 (no Piet at all) and 7 (Piet depicting a cartoon and/or caricatured black person) were the most prominent for Sinterklaas products available with online store Bol.com in 2019; over half of all products assessed were assigned to either grade 1 or 7 (27.3% and 30.6 respectively). The dominance of grade 7 shows how attached the Zwarte Piet characterisation is to portrayals of black people in the Sinterklaas festival. Grade 8 was the next most prominent, with 14.0% of the products, down from 21% in 2018. See Graphs 11 and 12 for more details on the Bol.com data for 2019.

Graph 11



Graph 12



The most problematic categories of products continued to be music, DVDs, toys, puzzles and games and decorations, which each offered multiple products graded at either 7 or 8. For Sinterklaas books, analysis showed improvement in 2019 as we were able to review the backs of books with new viewing

functions available on Bol.com. As also described above, often books can only be graded 1 online, as it is not possible to see the back cover, however now data collectors can double check this in order to give certain books a more accurate grade.

The analysis of costumes was more complicated this year, as certain costumes that would have previously received a grade 8 in 2018 had stickers over the face of the model in 2019, arguably to appear less offensive and obscure the blackfaced Zwarte Piet character, as seen in the case of Figure 25 below (Feestbeest.nl, 2020). Here we can see that the model has brown hands, and therefore the image is still graded as 7 due to the depiction of Zwarte Piet by (and therefore as) a person of colour. In similar cases, the model wears black gloves, and therefore the image still gets a grade 8, as black gloves worn by Zwarte Piet almost always also feature blackface.

Figure 25

Zwarte Piet Kostuum | Rode Piet Kostuum Verkleedkleding

Merk: Feestbeest.nl | ☆☆☆☆ Schrijf een review | ✉ E-mail deze pagina



Moving away from Sinterklaas-related products, Bol.com was called out in 2019 for the sale of a so-called “Jungle en Afrika kostuum” (RTL Nieuws, 2019). The racist depiction of black “Zulu” Africans in this carnival costume product on the Bol.com website was challenged directly by the InterNational Anti-Racism Group (INARG), who contacted the company to ask them to take down the costume, which as of time of writing remains for sale via the website (Bol.com, 2020; Guirca, 2020).

Beyond the stores

In addition to the in-store observations made at the main shops featured in this study, further observations were made at numerous supermarkets and in shop windows throughout the country during the Sinterklaas *period*. In Groningen, a variety of grade 1 seasonal products were viewed on display at the Coop supermarket (Kerklaan), including *kruidnoten* by Koopmans and Sint figurines (see Figure 26).

Figure 26



A Coop in Rotterdam sold grade 7 cookies by Smikkelhuys. Also in Rotterdam, a grade 8 poster for a meet-and-greet session with Sinterklaas, hosted by Nettomarkt (Pleinweg), revealed sponsorship of the event by major chains such as Coop, Zeeman and Gall & Gall. Moreover, De Rimboe pet shop (also in Rotterdam) had various grades on display in its window during the Sinterklaas period, including the AH Sint and Piet mascots as shown above (see Figure 27).

Figure 27



Walking through the town of Arnhem, one of our fieldworkers noted a poster that promoted a Sinterklaas bingo game, using grade 7 imagery (see Figure 28).

Figure 28



Close by in Nijmegen, a *Pieten Wensenwinkel*, viewable for the street, displayed grade 7 dolls as decorations. Similarly in Harderwijk, grade 7 Zwarte Piet dolls were viewed hanging in the windows of a *hypotheek kantoor* (mortgage advisor's office). This was also the case in major city Utrecht, where a bakery was observed with various grade 7 dolls in its window. Also in Utrecht, local shop Slammat still had grade 7 Piet statue on display in its window, as we reported in last year's study. Further north in Wachstum, a seasonal catalogue for Snijders (a regional chain selling farm supplies, as well as outside and garden products) featured grade 8 imagery and advertisements. In capital city Amsterdam (Noord), a local Primera store sold grade 7 gift wrap for Sinterklaas, which was also displayed in a grade 7 box. Additionally, the Primera sold grade 3 costumes (see Figure 29).

list of Montreux 110-118

98-104

PIETENPAK

BESCHIKBAAR IN:

OH KOM ER
EENS KIJKEN...

Article nr. 2548778

Primark 8.99

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Figure 31



Bookstore Paagman (Lange Poten, Den Haag) offered lots of Sinterklaas books for children, as noted in previous years, which could be assigned a full range of grades. While some books appeared (according to the front cover) to be grade 1, the grade would change when looking at the back. Fieldworkers also noted that this Paagman had a grade 2 Toney's Chocoloneys letters display, and sold grades 1 and 3 gift wrap at the counter, stacked in a grade 2 box (see Figure 32).

Figure 32



Meanwhile, just across the border in Brussels (Zuid train station), grade 7 chocolate figurines were available at the Carrefour. These treats were sold in boat-shaped packaging, which also featured further grade 7 imagery, maintaining the current Sinterklaas narrative (see Figure 33).

Figure 33



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Conclusions

As shown in the previous chapter, the largest supermarket in the country - Albert Heijn - offered similar online data in 2019 to previous years in this study, continuing for the most part to illustrate a move away from the Zwarte Piet character. On the other hand, in-store research shows how individual stores around the country (which are often franchised and thus have a certain degree of freedom), continue to sell grades 7 (depictions of Zwarte Piet as a black person) and 8 (white people performing Zwarte Piet in blackface) products, regardless of Albert Heijn's official branding guidelines. Major competitor Jumbo offered Sinterklaas products with a combination of grades 4 (numerous Piets with various ethnicities), 5 (white sooty Piets) and 6 (multi-coloured - via face paint - Piets) for the second year in a row, indicating that perhaps this is becoming the standard branding for the store during the Sinterklaas season. Arguably, this conflicted narrative aims to please all parties in the ongoing debate by avoiding committing to real, radical changes on one hand, or sticking to the so-called "traditional" mythology. For example, PLUS - which is still quite new to this study - offered double the amount of grade 7 products in 2019 compared to 2018, based on online data collection. If this trend continues in future editions of the report, it will indicate that the store is moving strongly towards a more racialised orientation of the controversial character, and away from the ongoing "sooty" reinvention of (Zwarte) Piet.

Blokker's house-brand decorations are consistently grade 5 based on online and in-store research. Therefore, the "sooty Piet" (*roetveegpiet*) is a strong Sinterklaas narrative for the future of their brand. On the other hand, as a store Blokker mainly sells third-party products, which conversely offer a wider array of grades according to the analysis of this year's report. These Blokker results may come across as inconclusive, however such results are actually indicative of the nationwide conflict over how to depict Zwarte Piet in the years to come. XENOS also sells numerous third-party products both online, and in-store and consequently offered a mixed bag of results in 2019. Interestingly, their house-brand depictions of the Sint and Piet characters juxtapose Sinterklaas as much lighter than the Piets, who either appear to be light or slightly darker brown and always with sooty smudge marks in decorations, branding or items themselves. Regardless of the inclusion of soot, this depiction maintains the historical storyline of a white Sint with brown and/or black servants.

Kruidvat and Etos (two more major, third-party selling stores) also offered up mixed results during online analysis in 2019. Kruidvat especially saw a lot of their own products graded as either 2 or 7 - i.e. a non-committal silhouette of a Piet, or a depiction of a black person as a Piet. Etos' online products were split between grades 1, 2, 3 and 5, illustrating some confusion about who Piet should be, although a certain level of clarity that the character should be white and potentially sooty. Child-focused toy store Intertoys continued to feature grade 7 products prominently (28.6%) on their website for Sinterklaas. Although grade 8 was no longer present in the results for this store (compared to 2018), this is hardly an improvement as certain products continue to communicate to children that black people should fulfil a subservient role in society.

HEMA - a store that sells very few third-party products - demonstrates a much more consistent Sinterklaas narrative with far less ambiguity than other stores or brands. Any Sinterklaas product featuring a Piet (since 47.1% of their products do not feature the character at all) is either sooty or not sooty. According to HEMA branding, Piets can be portrayed as white, but also as people of colour. They never appear to have multi-coloured face paint or exaggerated, racialised characteristics. In short, anyone can be a Piet, and his smudge marks come from soot. We can of course debate the value of officially adding the soot narrative into the story, when for so many years "it's just soot" has been the unconvincing explanation in response to accusations of racism. However, from a purely marketing perspective, HEMA arguably offers one of the more coherent revised versions of the (commercial) Sinterklaas mythology. That is until you examine Sinterklaas himself.

As noted above, fieldworkers have observed an increasing overlap at HEMA between two key interpretations of the Saint Nicholas figure (namely that of the Dutch and North Americans): Sinterklaas and Santa Claus. We should not interpret this overlap, which we anticipate will eventually spill over into other stores in the coming years, as being anything more significant than a fight for the most commercial version of the story, as the popularity of Christmas as a child-centred gift-giving festival threatens to outshine Sinterklaas. Rather than re-assert the importance of the figure of Sinterklaas, HEMA chooses to sell Sint products alongside Santa and Christmas items during the same November to December time-span. From what they put on their shelves, they tangibly show that Sinterklaas is not the cornerstone of Dutch celebrations and culture: it is simply another opportunity to consume.

Confectionary store Jamin and supermarket Ekoplaza both had 100% grade 1 (no Piet references) products according to online research. In-store, however, Ekoplaza sold Sinterklaas home-brand products with grade 3 packaging, indicating that for the store, Piet is still very much a part of the story, albeit with no soot marks or facepaint.

As for online store Bol.com, grades 7 and 8 still account for almost half of all assessed Bol.com products between them, reflecting the stray observations of fieldworkers in other stores and marketplaces throughout the Netherlands and even beyond. Ultimately, even as we see significant shifts taking place in certain major stores according to their official websites, franchised locations alongside privately run businesses take it upon themselves, year-on-year, to preserve the racism and exclusion of the festival through displaying the most offensive interpretations of the Piet character. Due to so many of its products coming from third-party sources, interpretations of Bol.com's most offensive data has to be viewed and analysed within this context.

As we reflect on the Sinterklaas festival as a whole, 2019 proved to be a year of violence in the Netherlands, with certain stakeholders attempting to maintain white supremacy at all costs. A broader point that continues to occur year-on-year is that the so-called "Sinterklaas discussion" is not really about the festival, per se. As the festivities do not occur in a socio-cultural vacuum, one cannot ignore the wider Dutch racial and power dynamics at play, nor the impact those dynamics have on the progress of one side in this ongoing debate (anti-blackface) over the other (pro-blackface).

The popular Dutch, nativist refrain of "If you don't like how we do things, then leave", is so pervasive in this discussion - or indeed any discussions that find fault with the Netherlands. Subsequently, it is difficult to realise significant progress in making Dutch society more inclusive or in reforming discriminatory practices, especially when citizens and/or residents are marked as outsiders if they pushed for change. Due to their confidence in their own sense of superiority, the Dutch - by and large - do not think they need to change and anyone who disagrees simply cannot be truly Dutch. Karlijn Völke's thorough chronologicalisation of anti-Zwarte Piet and anti-racism movements in the Netherlands demonstrates clearly to us that throughout the previous century, there were continuous moments of resistance. Yet, white people continue to dress up as an anti-black character in order to sell merchandise, as well as feel more powerful and rooted than the racialised "other". One could be forgiven for feeling as though the Netherlands is stuck in a neo-colonial-commerce time-loop spanning several decades. Indeed, Quinsy Gario's *Zwarte Piet is Racisme* art campaign will be a decade old in 2021, but even the salience of this more recent intervention has not shifted Sinterklaas' happy servant from shop shelves. Moreover, as Gario's essay in this report reveals, even when small changes do occur - however superficial - Dutch individuals and institutions choose to self-congratulate rather than valourise the efforts of so-called outsiders who fought for a voice and platform in order to be seen as human and belonging. This happens in all sectors of contemporary Dutch society, and the ongoing push and pull over the racism implied in the depiction of the figure who accompanies Sinterklaas each year is no different.

For example, Xavier Donker's essay on the forthcoming commemoration of the Dutch slave trade via a monument in the city of Den Haag reflects succinctly and yet pointedly on who (i.e. the white political establishment) dictates national, collective memory in the Netherlands. Additionally, his essay highlights the power dynamics at play in the avoidance of accepting responsibility over the legacies of racism in the Netherlands. Furthermore, Nurulsyahirah Taha's contribution illustrates the historical, imperial and global ramifications of Dutch culture being enforced upon colonial subjects in Indonesia, which continues to feed into local anti-black practices through to the 21st century. Thinking about how long it is taking the Dutch to even come to terms with their involvements in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonisations of various parts of the world (an ongoing process), it is evermore arguable that progress over the deracialisation of Zwarte Piet alone will not be the tipping point towards racial equality in the Netherlands. Unchallenged white supremacist thought is far too wide-spread for that.

However, our report continues to show in part how citizens and residents of the Netherlands express so much about the country and their place within it when discussing the future of Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet. Through the work and words of activists such as Levi Ommen and Mariam Elmaslouhi, we are inspired by their endeavours. As a student campaigner with the ASA, Ommen provides room for discussion and support among black students organising within a hostile university campus environment. Meanwhile, Elmaslouhi's political activism directly calls out the city of Den Haag (The

Hague) for not measuring up to its international reputation as a city of peace and justice, when it comes to protecting black Dutch communities. Through their essays here, we come to learn how negotiable Dutchness actually becomes - even for people (of colour) born here - if you dare to question how Dutch society operates. Hence, there is still value in monitoring the progress and process of removing racism from the Netherlands' largest cultural event, even as we increasingly acknowledge that this is part of a much bigger picture of social change. It will continue to be interesting to observe whether gender and racial dynamics within this debate will go on to influence how we interpret the Sinterklass character itself in the years to come, as we have seen via the work of Gloria Holwerda-Williams, who dares to perform the role of Sinterklaas as a black woman.

Although Zwarte Piet continues to be a recurrent part of the Sinterklaas festival - via packaging, promotions and products themselves - our year-on-year data over a period of five years shows how large-scale businesses are increasingly reticent to use imagery that explicitly depicts the servant as a black person or makes use of 19th and early 20th century caricatures of black people. Stores such as Albert Heijn, HEMA, Jamin and Ekoplaza consistently move towards a sooty Piet narrative in their Sinterklaas branding. Additionally, blackface depictions of the character by white people have decreased over the last five years, in spite of aggressive responses from extremists. There is, as we have shown, ambivalence on the part of certain stores and brands (e.g. Jumbo, Blokker, Kruidvat and Etos), who offer an assortment of Piet characterisations to the public. Then again, there is increasing comfort - at least in marketing - with the idea that Piet is not necessarily characterised as racially other. Observing this last point emerge over time makes it all the more frustrating to see stores such as PLUS, XENOS, Intertoys and Bol.com continue to offer the most offensive and anti-black products available for Sinterklaas. The stores themselves might argue - if questioned - that it is about a demand for the "traditional" story via the image of a "real" Zwarte Piet. Whatever the stores' reasons for continuing to sell racist merchandise, we cannot escape the fact that there are plenty of alternative options available (as our data makes clear) in order to avoid the continued promotion of blackface during Sinterklaas. Therefore, anyone buying and/or selling these racist products (i.e. grades 7 and 8) can only be viewed, from this point forward, as being complicit in Dutch institutionalised anti-black racism.

The discussions about Zwarte Piet continue to drag on and inflame already racially charged sentiments about so-called Dutch heritage, identity and belonging, because these matters go unresolved in the country as a whole. We cannot and will not find a singular pathway to celebrate Sinterklaas together as a united society, until those wounds and tensions heal and find resolution.

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Appendix C: Glossary of Sinterklaas-specific terms

Intocht

Annual parade in November, typically attended by several thousand people, at which Sinterklaas and his many Zwarte Pieten enter the Netherlands by steamboat. The *intocht* is the official start of the Sinterklaas festival, culminating on the 5th of December.

Jan Schenkman

A Dutch teacher, poet, and author of children's books (1806 - 1863) who "invented" the modern day Sinterklaas festival by being the first to write down various popular elements from the Sinterklaas legend into one coherent story in his book *Sinterklaas en zijn knecht* (Sinterklaas and his slave) in 1850. Old elements which he incorporated were the horse, the riding on rooftops, punishment of "bad children" with a rod, and the handing out of presents via the chimney. New elements which he added himself were the steamboat with which Sinterklaas enters the Netherlands, and a black page or servant, which grew into the current figure of Zwarte Piet.

Kick Out Zwarte Piet

Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP) is a collective of activist groups and platforms in the Netherlands (Nederland Wordt Beter, Zwarte Piet Niet and Stop Blackface), who - by means of peaceful protest - aim to end the existence of what they perceive as the racist figure of Zwarte Piet.

Kruidnoten

A type of cookie, small, crunchy and dark brown, prepared with *speculaas* spices (see under Speculaas), traditionally eaten during the Sinterklaas festival. Commonly, Zwarte Piet has sacks of these cookies from which he hands them out to children and/or throws them into the crowd.

Letters

Chocolate letters of the alphabet, traditionally given to people as a present during the Sinterklaas festival. Commonly, one receives the first letter of their first name. Chocolate letters can be of all types of chocolate and may also include almonds, raisins, etc.

Pepernoten

A type of cookie, small, soft and light brown, prepared with aniseed, traditionally eaten during the Sinterklaas festival. Commonly, Zwarte Piet has sacks of these cookies from which he hands them out to children and/or throws them into the crowd.

Roetveegpiet

Piet character who, instead of full blackface with big red lips and gold hoop earrings, has smudges of soot on his face on account of the story that Piet enters houses to deliver presents through the chimney. Since about 2017 in a limited number of Dutch municipalities (mostly in the West of the country), the *roetveegpiet* has come to replace the traditional Zwarte Piet due to protest against this character.

Sinterklaas

Also, known as Saint Nicholas, based on the historical figure of the bishop of Myra who lived in the 3rd century AD in Asia Minor. For unknown reasons - but most likely due to Dutch history in which the Spanish played an important part - it is sometimes (mistakenly) claimed that Sinterklaas hails from Spain. Sinterklaas is the main protagonist of a festival in his name on the 5th of December (in the Netherlands and some of its former colonies) and the 6th of December (in Belgium). The character is most commonly portrayed as an old white man with a beard, red miter and cloak, riding a white horse. In this report, Sinterklaas refers to both the character and the festival.

Speculaas

A type of cookie, usually hard, flat and rectangular but sometimes also soft, round and filled with almond paste. The cookies are made with *speculaas* herbs. Commonly these are cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, ginger powder, cardamom and white pepper, all of which were first obtained by the Dutch in the East Indies. *Speculaas* is traditionally eaten during the festival of Sinterklaas, but can be found in shops year-round.

Taai Taai

A type of soft (or tough = *taai*) cookie, traditionally eaten during the festival of Sinterklaas. Its taste resembles that of *speculaas* but includes aniseed. *Taai taai* are usually baked in the shape of characters from the Sinterklaas festival, such as Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet.

Zwarte Piet

Character portrayed as the helper of Sinterklaas. Traditionally, Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) arrives with Sinterklaas and helps to deliver presents through the chimney to 'good' children and/or punish 'bad' children on behalf of Sinterklaas. The current shape of Zwarte Piet was designed by Jan Schenkman, an author of a children's book on Sinterklaas from 1850. Despite occasional recent changes (see *roetveegpiet* above) Zwarte Piet is most commonly portrayed as a white person in blackface, with an Afro wig, big red lips and/or gold hoop earrings.