

Blackface & Gatekeeping Belonging

ERIF Brand & Product Study 2025

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Cover art:
HEMA Christmas tree decorated with a Sint doll | ERIF | 2019
Jumbo Sinterklaas game | ERIF | 2018
KOZP protest banner | Burobraak | 2017
Quotes of Resistance postcard | Burobraak/Parnell-Berry & Michel/ERIF | 2021
HEMA chocolate letter | ERIF | 2016
Zwarte Piet hat on a lamp at Café Koffieboontje, Utrecht | Carlton-Willis/ERIF | 2021
Xenos Piet drummer decoration | ERIF | 2022
Quotes of Resistance postcard | Burobraak/Parnell-Berry & Michel/ERIF | 2021
Xenos Piet decoration | ERIF | 2023



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Much love and solidarity,
Bel, Martijn, Naomi, Jenny, Toon & Noémi

Introduction

“Appropriating our own image interferes with their privilege to fantasize”. Arletta Pérez Hernández (2025).

Sinterklaas is arguably the most popular festival in the Netherlands, bringing families and communities together to celebrate with gifts, sweets, poetry and songs over a period of several weeks each year. It is a moment of hyper consumerism owing to both the gift-giving and feasting elements associated with its traditions. The festival is also injected with racially-driven consumerism due to the inclusion of Zwarte Piet, a blackface character who accompanies Sinterklaas (Saint Nicholas) on his voyage and stay in the Netherlands. Sinterklaas travels with numerous Piets from Spain by boat (recalling the trans-Atlantic trafficking of millions of enslaved Africans by the Dutch and other European powers), arriving around the middle of November, and staying until the 6th December¹. The arrival is marked by thousands of “intocht”² street parties throughout November to celebrate, with an eventual party occurring on 5th December when Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet are said to have delivered the gifts.

As was the case in any enslavement-based economy of the European colonial-era (of which the Netherlands was a major player), according to the Sinterklaas mythology the entire success of the festival is dependent on how well Zwarte Piet performs in his role working for the Saint. He is thus simultaneously relied upon to ensure both the Saint and the gifts arrive safely, but is also the steady supply of comic relief due to his (racialized) antics. Criticism of the character, his racialized appearance and the racism the character encourages towards Black people has been demonstrable in the Netherlands for at least 100 years (Völke, 2020). However, meaningful institutional changes in how it is celebrated, consumed and understood only became visible from 2011 onwards.

As an organisation, ERIF strives to reimagine Europe by interrogating power and dominant notions of belonging; the Brand and Product study is one example of how we have undertaken this. Our reports over the past decade have systematically traced the evolution of Zwarte Piet—an icon of Dutch Afrophobia—in relation to anti-racist discourse, creating a longitudinal study that contributes to race in the marketplace scholarship as well as archiving consumer resistance and advocacy. This longitudinal interdisciplinary study reviews online and in-store products and to what extent those products evoke racist depictions of Black people, in order to draw conclusions about how effective social justice campaigns have been—in changing the Sinterklaas narrative, by removing an anti-Black character—in both advertising and material cultural terms. Alongside the valorisation of the precious and essential anti-racist campaign work that has been undertaken in response to Dutch Afrophobic violence, ERIF’s reports also contribute to furthering contemporary scholarship of Dutch history, cultures and traditions (Helsloot, 2011; 2012); colonial histories and legacies of consumption, wealth and marketing (Boulabiza, 2024; Davis, 2007; Campbell Gosling, Green & Millar, 2024; Hund, Pickering & Ramamurthy, 2013; Ramamurthy, 2003); as well as to scholarship around racism, identity, belonging and social justice movements (Esajas, 2018; Essed & Hoving, 2014; Ghorashi, 2023; Wekker, 2016). Relatedly, this year-on-year study can be positioned amongst discourses that place race as both a force of oppression and resistance in various marketplace contexts (Grier et al., 2024; Johnson et al., 2019; Shabbir, Hyman & Kostyk, 2023; Sobande et al., 2021). We began tracking these developments from 2015, shortly after our first conference on blackface in Europe (in November 2014). Thus, this report serves as a celebration of both decade-long milestones, offering 10 years of anti-racist FMCG³ market research, couched within a broader European context. To acknowledge our own full circle moment, as well as situate this year’s findings within an international context, the 2025 report is in conversation with accounts⁴ of blackface from across Europe.

Our Witness from Ticino provides a timeline-essay of the debates around blackface during the Easter parades in the Italian region of Switzerland; the tensions and lines of argument are familiar to the historical, piecemeal progress of the Zwarte Piet discussion in the Netherlands. Georgina Marcelino’s essay and Arletta Pérez Hernández’s artistic intervention—both from the Spanish perspective of the use of blackface during the Three Kings Parades—reveal a similar discourse, illustrating concretely how pro-blackface arguments are rooted in a white, nativist supremacy that goes beyond Benelux borders. Our other three pieces offer Dutch-international perspectives on Sinterklaas. An essay from Dutch scholar Ashley Melcherts, from her positionality as an academic based in the US, gives crucial context on the role of the festival within Dutch culture, reflecting on growing up in the Netherlands and her disruptive and traumatic first encounter with Zwarte Piet as a Black child. Ashley gifts us an important insider-outsider perspective in dialogue with the creative and jarring account from das james—a multidisciplinary artist from the US, now based in the

¹ The historical bishop Saint Nicholas died on 6th December 343. He is thus commemorated throughout Europe either on that date or its eve, 5th December, as in the Netherlands.

² See appendix D for a glossary of common Dutch Sinterklaas vocabulary.

³ Fast Moving Consumer Goods.

⁴ See appendix E for contributor biographies.

Netherlands—poignantly capturing his first encounter with Zwarte Piet. Both pieces engage with the more explicit US-oriented understandings of race, calling into question the ways in which the Netherlands projects its racial ignorance as white innocence. Our report does not end with the “Conclusions” chapter; it closes instead with a poetic essay by James Yuca, where the reader is called into the delightful disturbance of “the white cube” by Afrodiasporic voice and presence. What emerges from the piece is a damning judgement on the perplexing way that the Netherlands prides itself on its colonial past at the same time as pretending it has no awareness of it.

ERIF would like to issue a
TRIGGER WARNING
for the remaining chapters of this report,
as they contain imagery readers may find
distressing.

Still “Locating Zwarte Piet”? Our study 10 years on

“The oppressor can never be trusted as historian. Our task is preservation. Collective memory is a liberation practice. Remember and tell it”. Cole Arthur Riley (2024).

Dating back to the mid-19th century, Sinterklaas honours Saint Nicholas and is a hallmark of Dutch tradition and culture—a testament to how the country likes to see itself: as fun, open and laid back. Complicating this rather positive self-image is, and always has been, the figure of Zwarte Piet: a caricature of an enslaved Black man (recalling the Dutch history of human trafficking and enslavement-based plantations), held in indefinite servitude to Sinterklaas. The character is played in blackface by white and non-Black performers, with costumes that (historically) include pitch-black face-paint covering the whole face, red lipstick to emphasize and enlarge the mouth, curly “afro” wigs, golden earrings and, at times, an exaggerated Surinamese accent. The undertaking of racial mimicry and mockery would be incomplete without an over-the-top physicality element to the characterisation, which is why Zwarte Pieten are both skilled acrobats and also too clumsy to walk in a straight line. The link to the practice of blackface minstrelsy (which feeds into racist stereotypes of Black people) should be obvious, but pro-Zwarte Piet campaigners argue it is merely a harmless costume that prevents children from recognising their kinfolk during the festivities. The truth of course is more complicated than this. White people in blackface get to try on and out “blackness”: a socially-imagined deviant, exotic type of embodiment rooted in racist fantasy. The very ideas inherent in blackface performance elevate whiteness above Blackness, the latter of which becomes totally dehumanized in the process, thereby justifying systemic oppression. Lastly, and in connection with the previous point, what fun is a racist joke if its subject is in on it? White people necessarily must be the ones to play Zwarte Piet, because it is the vehicle that allows the most vile and public humiliations of Black people.

The Architecture of Change: Building Systematic Opposition to Zwarte Piet

Two years after Quinsy Gario and Jerry Afriyie were arrested at a Sinterklaas parade in Dordrecht for quietly protesting against Zwarte Piet (Gario, 2012), the UN urged the Netherlands to foster a “respectful national debate” about the festival (OHCHR, 2013; United Nations, 2013). The institutional impact of this international attention and implied criticism was swift. For a country that likes to see itself as open, accepting and liberal, the Netherlands collectively bristled at this external judgement, despite having largely suppressed internal anti-racist discussion on the topic for decades (Völke, 2020). Driven by regular anti-black street demonstrations and eventual dialogues with patient, anti-racist campaigners, the NTR public television show *Het Sinterklaas Journaal* (roughly translated as: “The Sinterklaas News”), which sets the tone for the festival as the most visible manifestation and characterisation, announced that it would incrementally adjust to a new version of Piet: *roetveeg Piet* (Ersoy, 2024), building into the previously contestable chimney narrative. Major Dutch cities (including Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht) followed suit by announcing their own parades would gradually also be blackface-free, as well as schools and other public spaces (Het Parool, 2017). These are the kinds of cross-sectoral and cultural modifications that materially impacted brands; we were able to show significant trends related to this by our fifth report (Parnell-Berry et al., 2020). The same year we published that report with five years’ worth of trends, Den Haag city council announced a motion to ban Zwarte Piet from its future arrival parades (Den Haag, 2020; Riem, 2020).

When we at ERIF heard the news that Zwarte Piet would be banned in all schools in the city of Den Haag in 2015 (Omroep West, 2015), we knew we needed to follow the fallout of such a decision somehow. At the time, we were fresh from our first conference, *Returning the Gaze: Blackface in Europe* (ERIF, 2014) in November 2014, where numerous scholars and activists came to discuss the specific understandings around and strategies against blackface in Europe (ERIF, 2021; Parnell-Berry & Michel, 2020). As we had hosted the conference in Amsterdam during the Sinterklaas season (our own form of protest against the continued and fanatical use of blackface), the topic of Zwarte Piet became a focal point. It was clear from the audience that parents and teachers were very worried about the impact such imagery would have long-term—not only on Black children, but all children—in terms of them learning about racial dynamics and structures.

We were subsequently inspired to organize a community-level parent-teacher day at Teatro Munganga (Amsterdam) in November 2015 (ERIF, 2015). While there, one of the participants mentioned that Jamin (a Dutch confectionary retailer) would remove Zwarte Piet imagery from their assortments and packaging. Hearing this, we immediately became determined to begin recording any such market developments. At the time, the only other regular monitoring of public opinions on Zwarte Piet was conducted by *EenVandaag*, whose study began in 2013 and ran for a decade (2023). While their opinion poll has also demonstrated how, over time, Zwarte Piet’s cultural significance has decreased, our intended research would prove to be more concerned with what people are exposed to and have access to via stores. In this way, our research has somewhat been in conversation with the *EenVandaag* study. Armed initially with a rather rudimentary methodology we undertook our first study, *Locating Zwarte Piet*, to see which stores, brands and products still used Zwarte Piet and which were revising their offerings (ERIF, 2016). A talented and experienced team of researchers, we knew we would need to come back to the study at least once more to see if our results were pure fluke based on the temperature of the time, or if this was systemic change. Our second report, *Charting Change*, cemented

our collective commitment to following the evolution and fluctuations of Sinterklaas merchandise and marketing in relation to sustained social justice movements (ERIF, 2017). Since the start of our study coincided with the formation of Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP), a coalition of anti-racist organisations campaigning against the use of blackface during Sinterklaas, this in turn meant our results would always be tethered to the impact of activism. Therefore, in addition to our valorisation of Dutch, grassroots anti-racism, our research also contributes to the race in the marketplace literature on consumer resistance and advocacy dimensions (Grier et al., 2024; Parnell-Berry & Michel, 2021; Shabbir, Hyman & Kostyk, 2023).

Anti-racist waves in the seas of DEIB

The past 10 years have offered much encouraging evidence to suggest businesses and practitioners are continuing to at least attempt to embrace diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging (DEIB) and overall social justice in the ways in which they run their companies, offer their services and market their products (Campaign Podcast, 2024; Hiorns, 2025; Quinn de-Jong, 2023). This stems both from businesses and consumers alike feeling a certain sense of social responsibility and accountability toward each other, as well as increased consumer vigilance and awareness of their rights (Amazon Ads, 2023; De Goede Zaak, 2025). In all cases and from all perspectives, there are strong arguments to be made on the impact of return-on-investment (ROI) when business and audience are coherently aligned (Varma, 2023). Arguably, these business shifts have been driven by more social concerns, as purchasers become more invested than ever in a fairer world, and thus use their buying power to demonstrate their values. Moreover, research has demonstrated that buyers are also thinking increasingly about their own personal wellbeing when they consume, in terms of both physical but also mental health (Bahl et al., 2016).

Signs that businesses do respond to these social currents (either proactively to set a good example to their brand communities, or reactively in response to customer criticism) is reflected in DEIB-driven campaigns by major brands over the past decade. In the Netherlands, bol.com published an inclusivity-driven ad for Christmas 2023, featuring a family who use the online retailer to order products last minute to provide sensorial comfort to a loved one during the holidays (Bol, 2023). In this sense, the ad not only ticks the box for diversity, but also taps into emotive narratives around family time and welcoming homes. On the other hand, in the UK, major British brand Boots used actress Anjoa Andoh as “Mrs. Claus”—who actually organizes all of the gifts while her “Santa” husband sleeps—in 2024, implying that the major holiday is actually run by a Black woman (Biggs, 2024). The characterisation plays on one hand with Andoh’s *Bridgerton*⁵ persona, Lady Dandbury, as a no-nonsense fixer. On the other hand, one could argue having a Black woman come in and save Christmas on behalf of a hapless white man feeds into existing racially-gendered and ruinous tropes that have been in circulation via pop culture(s) and advertising⁶ (Bogle, 2003; Turner, 1994). Either way, this inclusion illustrates that brands are aware that their audiences and potential targets are diverse and want to be seen. Even brands and products targeting children, such as major doll producer Mattel, have joined in on the action. In 2023, for example, Mattel put out an ad for its latest range of Barbie products, featuring a child that would be gendered as a boy playing along with the bright pink toys. In progressive circles, this might inspire little more than a shoulder shrug, but marketing scientists will of course notice the boldness of such a move, given that it is still entirely the norm to market dolls (or anything pink, for that matter) exclusively to children gendered as girls, and cars and dinosaurs to children gendered as boys.

Nonetheless, certain commercial sectors, businesses and consumers alike already wave their “DEIB fatigue” flags to signal enough is enough (Kapoor, 2025)—often using violent means to do so. Despite the positioning Mattel seemed to take, on the whole brands continue to binarily normalize the segregation of children’s items into “for boys” and “for girls” (both in-store and in ads) across sectors and nations, teaching children from infancy what they can and cannot wear as well as how they should and shouldn’t play. More directly, Boots received significant backlash for featuring Adjoa Andoh “replacing” Father Christmas in its ads⁷, particularly from supporters of right-wing groups in the UK (Biggs, 2024; Mitchell, 2024). Moreover, racist ad scandals continue to persist. Take for instance two ads run by Heinz in 2024, where the major FMCG brand was compelled to recall and apologize for the manner in which it depicted Black consumers wide-eyed, insatiable, with red food sauce greedily spilled around their mouths—evoking blackface minstrelsy imagery (Gohil, 2024; Johnson, 2012; Louis, 2024; Parnell-Berry & Michel, 2020; Pickering, 2008; Pilgrim, 2015). The fact that instances like this continue to occur well into the 21st century is an indication that anti-Black racism remains a serious social challenge, found in various domains of life (ENAR, 2014; FRA, 2023; Michael & Reynolds, 2024; Nwabuzo, n.d.; Parnell-Berry & Michel, 2021), and that anti-Black imagery and rhetoric specifically doesn’t merely cause offense, but can in and of itself reduce livelihoods (Africa No Filter, 2025; Boulabiza, 2024), which is why its inclusion in widespread advertising and marketing campaigns is a cause for concern, critique and investigation (Davis et al., 2025; Grier, 2025; Grier et al., 2024; Shabbir, Hyman & Kostyk, 2023).

⁵ *Bridgerton* itself was considered groundbreaking in terms of its casting of characters for a period show, contributing to a wave of historical films and television shows featuring characters with racially diverse backgrounds.

⁶ Watching Andoh sashay in to manage the chaos with a snap of her fingers (however fabulous she looks doing it), calls to mind the strong Black woman and/or the mammy, both of whom solely exist in the white supremacist imagination in order to maintain white dominance by taking on disproportionate workloads that are simultaneously invisibilized—as is literally illustrated in the Boots ad.

⁷ Which is arguably why Gloria Holwerda Williams’ (2020) artistic-protest as a Black woman “Sint” was so radical and subversive in the Dutch context.

The Sinterklaas Contradiction: Progress and Persistence

This brings us to the most popular Dutch festival: Sinterklaas. How does the children's holiday fit into this contemporary DEIB tug-of-war? Similar to some of the examples mentioned above, online retailer bol.com touched on the gender-inclusive thematics of the day, but in their case the ad features a little girl who wants to be "the Sint" (Mirande, 2023; Van Zaane, 2023)—a role typically reserved for old, white men. The ad mainly plays the scene for laughs, but aspirational questions continue to linger, asking the viewer "Why not?" On the other hand, major Dutch department store HEMA offered an ad featuring a racially-mixed family (HEMA, 2023), whose children receive gifts from the more socially-acceptable "sooty" Piets that have emerged in the past 10 years as an alternative to Zwarte Piet (ERIF, 2016). Moreover, racially minoritized individuals are featured evermore in racially "neutral" Dutch advertising roles and settings, rather than always in stereotypical roles as was the case historically, including during Sinterklaas. However, even though we can see how DEIB efforts have impacted Sinterklaas marketing, and despite more than 10 years of consistent and society-wide discussion, and many institutional efforts to remove Zwarte Piet from the festival, we continue to record the caricature's presence every year.

Vianen—the city chosen for the official Sinterklaas arrival parade in 2024—kicked things off by promoting the event with a poster featuring a Zwarte Piet, complete with full blackface, afro wig and red lips (NOS, 2024a). The municipality was forced to apologize for this blunder, as it is inconsistent with the "official" Sinterklaas story, which in turn is guided by the children's national television series *Het Sinterklaas Journaal*, which broadcasts the whole parade. As we noted above, since 2019 *Het Journaal* only uses the more so-called politically correct roetveeg Piet ("sooty" Pete) for their depictions, and therefore the marketing of the national parade is supposed to follow suit for narrative coherence. Similarly, however, at the local Sinterklaas parade in Duindorp (Den Haag), Piets were also boldly performing in blackface (AD, 2024a)—and they are not alone. In fact, as we will show in the *Beyond the Stores* subchapter of this report, as more major brands intentionally turn away from racist merchandise during Sinterklaas, a steady stream of niche, online businesses have emerged in order to specifically sell Zwarte Piet products (Nederland Feest, 2024).

Such retailers claim they are merely preserving the "traditional" elements of the festival, which is part of their culture and heritage. They no doubt hope that using such terminologies will make their preservation and commercialisation of anti-Black imagery seem less harmful than it is (Wekker, 2016). The "traditions" line of argument also conveniently ignores how traditions and festivals can and (normally) do change with time (Hobsbawm, 1992), as well as much more overt racist violence that erupts around this topic. KOZP protestors were attacked again during their 2024 demonstrations, this time with eggs in the Zeeland town of Yerseke (de Volkskrant, 2024). According to KOZP, 28 municipalities out of a possible 40—such as Muntendam and Hoogezand-Sappemeer—wisely u-turned on using blackface performers for their parades after the campaign coalition threatened to join their festivities (AD, 2024b; Ersoy, 2024; de Kanttekening, 2024; RTV Noord, 2024).

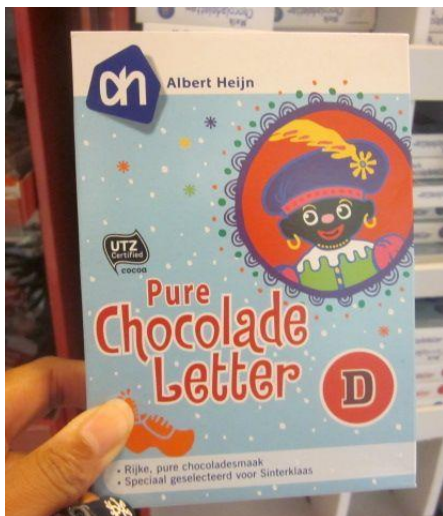
When thinking of the politics surrounding consumable Sinterklaas products (which are the subject of our analysis), we noted this year Nestlé breaking into the Sinterklaas market. Although known as a FMCG giant, often monopolising whole categories, this is the first year we have recorded this brand in our study. Arguably, this global brand might bring a fresh take in terms of both taste(s) and imagery. However, given Nestlé's ongoing track record with forced Black child labour in their cacao production system, their joining the Sinterklaas marketplace (which is already mired with pro-enslavement rhetoric) presents questionable optics and ethics. On the other hand, relative newcomer Tony's Chocolonely has worked hard in recent years to champion human rights in the chocolate industry, in addition to its sponsorship of Nederland Wordt Beter's efforts during Sinterklaas. Historically, we have associated Tony's products (namely chocolate letters) with our grade 2, we also recognize their attempts to (re)position as a transformative brand invested in inclusive and equitable marketing and production practices (Kraaijenbrink, 2019).

Praxis of Piet Imagery

We have noted the diversification of Piet-related imagery in response to ongoing anti-blackface protests. Various types of "sooty" Piet, rainbow coloured Piets and an increase in children (both white and racially minoritized) depicting Sinterklaas have complicated the analytical process, as well as the festival's mythical narrative. Meanwhile, the most alarming imagery—use of (caricatures of) people of African descent and white people in blackface—to depict Zwarte Piet, are shown to be in dramatic decline in terms of both visibility and cultural acceptability, from approximately 50% of products we analysed in 2015 (ERIF, 2016), down to roughly 2% in this report. For example, Figure 1 is an online screengrab of an Albert Heijn Zwarte Piet face painting kit, captured for our second report. On the other hand, Figure 2 was captured during in-store fieldwork at HEMA for this report (in November 2024). Similarly, Figure 3 (a chocolate letter captured in an Albert Heijn during our first study cycle in November 2015), is also illustrative of typical Sinterklaas merchandise packaging during the early years of our research. Meanwhile, Figure 4 shows a chocolate letter at a Jumbo in 2023, and is much more representative of the kinds of product packaging we tend to see in supermarkets in recent years. The contrast between the packaging within the past decade is demonstrative of the shifts we have observed and analysed throughout this study.



L: Figure 1. R: Figure 2.



L: Figure 3. R: Figure 4.

At the same time, we have recorded an increase in grade 2 products, from roughly 2% in our first report up to 20% of the current market share. Grade 2 is used for vague references to the Piet character, such as the use of the letter “P” on Sinterklaas decorations and party supplies; Piet hats, even and/or especially unworn ones; silhouettes and shadows of Pieten; Pieten hiding behind objects. We have referred to products with this grade as “sneaky Piet” products in earlier reports, due to their unclear racialisation, which allows the consumer to project whatever (potentially racist fantasy) they would like onto the item. Not only does this enable the continued circulation of Zwarte Piet narratives, it also allows businesses to hedge their bets either way. In other words, by using grade 2 imagery, brands can continue to attract pro-Zwarte Piet consumers who like to imagine the blackface behind the outline as well as stating plausible deniability to the anti-Zwarte Piet camp.

Concurrently, we have followed the institutionalisation of the roetveeg or “sooty” Piet. For many years, when someone would point out the inherent racism of the Zwarte Piet character—i.e., not only the use of blackface, but also his subordinate role in the story and implied enslavement to a white “master”, as well as the character’s racialized cadence—they would be met with the explanation “He’s black because he comes down the chimney”. Of course, this is nonsensical as it does not explain his “Surinamese” accent, afro wig, red lips or why the rest of his very colonial outfit remains soot free. Therefore, since this has never been a satisfactory way to account for Zwarte Piet’s appearance and persona, it made little sense that institutions and brands would turn to that narrative when called upon to reimagine the character. Furthermore, we have observed across several reports (including this one) that the updated Piet, either with or without soot marks, often still wears an afro wig and/or red lipstick. KOZP have referred to such representations as “Zwarte Piet light”, calling out directly that this is hardly a sustainable and reasonable solution to blackface during Sinterklaas (Ersoy, 2024).

Further, we have witnessed a steady increase in the proportion of Sinterklaas products featuring no (Zwarte) Piet imagery whatsoever. When we launched this research, less than 40% of the Sinterklaas products were analysed this way, although Piet-free products spiked to over 60% in 2021, likely due to the discussions influenced by the global movement(s) for Black Lives during the summer of 2020 (Kerkmeijer, 2021). Such a demonstrable shift following that social justice uprising reminds us how salient Zwarte Piet is as an example of anti-Black racism in the Netherlands, and since then Piet-free products have averaged between 50% and 60% (Kerkhoff-Parnell & Kerkmeijer, 2022; 2023; 2024). Thus, this years-long sustained anti-racist campaign arguably pushed businesses to dramatically revise their offerings, and live up to their DEIB promises. While we have been able to track what has been sold in stores, EenVandaag's research has correspondingly captured how the public mood shifted in response to the Dutch anti-racist movement, especially in the years of 2020 and 2021. The poll concluded in 2023 after 10 years; KOZP will also stop organising street demonstrations. However, just as other protesters will continue to disrupt blackface parades during Sinterklaas, ERIF will carry on chronicling the subsequent disruption of the Sinterklaas market.

"It's always been like that!" Blackface and the Easter Processions in Switzerland

A Witness from Ticino

The historic Processions of Mendrisio (Ticino, Switzerland), an Easter celebration recognized in 2019 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, has become the subject of heated debate regarding the use of blackface to depict the Mori (Moors), who are characterized as belonging to the Court of King Herod and traditionally portrayed with black painted faces. This is, by all means, not the only example of Swiss blackface; previous cases have been written about by Noémi Michel (2020) and Helena Bachmann (2023). Thus, the following press analysis summarizes the "Processions debate" as it was reported in the Swiss media, mainly in Ticino in the period from February 2024 to January 2025, adding to the ongoing discourses about blackface in Europe generally, and Switzerland specifically. However, this analysis is not exhaustive as it does not quote all the articles that have been written on this topic, the number of which is much more extensive.

About Ticino

The Canton of Ticino is located in the southern part of Switzerland and is the only Swiss canton where Italian is the only official language, spoken by the majority. It has a population of around 360,000 people: 70% of residents are Swiss nationals and about 30% are foreign nationals, mainly coming from neighbouring Italy, although half of the population is considered to have a "migration" background. As far as religion is concerned, 59% of the population declares to be Roman Catholic, whilst 27% considers themselves to have no religion (Repubblica e Cantone Ticino, 2023).

February 2024

In February 2024, the "Fondazione processioni storiche di Mendrisio", the foundation that organizes and promotes the tradition of the Historic Processions, announced its decision to discontinue the use of blackface for the Mori, citing the need to promote inclusivity and respect for all ethnic and racial groups. This decision was motivated by the necessity of adapting the tradition to contemporary social and cultural changes, acknowledging that blackface has historical connotations associated with harmful and stereotypical representations of Black individuals and it is widely recognized as a racist practice all over the world (Osservatore, 2024). At the beginning of this debate, the president of the foundation was given a lot of space in the press to explain that the values of the Processions are not linked to the skin colour of the characters, and that there have been other changes in the history of the event. For example, the Three Maris used to be portrayed by men dressed up as women. Moreover, there is no historical proof that a delegation of Black individuals was part of the court of King Herod, and therefore the origin of the Mori remains unclear (RSI, 2024a).

The announcement provoked a significant public outcry, particularly among the local population and political figures who even submitted a question to the Cantonal Parliament asking for clarifications on this decision. Prominent individuals, both public and private, including a former representative from Ticino in the National Council, expressed disapproval, arguing that the change undermined a centuries-old tradition. Political parties such as the Lega dei Ticinesi and the Swiss People's Party (UDC) strongly criticized the decision, labelling it an excessive form of political correctness (Lob, 2024). It did not take long before these were the only voices represented in the press.

The Swiss Federal Commission Against Racism, based in Bern, supported the elimination of blackface, emphasizing the importance of avoiding practices that could be perceived as harmful and highlighting once again that traditions change and adapt to the contexts and sensibilities of the time. On the other hand, some historians and local community members in Ticino defended the practice, arguing that it is a fundamental part of a theatrical tradition, distinct from the historically racist connotations of blackface that comes from the United States (Santoro, 2025). The tone of the voices in support of blackface became very dramatic. In a popular television programme, one person who volunteered in the organisation and production of the Processions since childhood said that "To go to the café and read in the newspaper that in Mendrisio the Mori will not be painted anymore, was like a dagger to the heart!" In the same television episode, the very idea of eliminating blackface was referred to numerous times as "censorship". Furthermore, the expert on inclusive language—invited to take a deeper look into the topic—stated that some people might be offended by the practice and voice their concern, but "minorities" need to remember that they are indeed not representative of the entire community, and therefore society cannot become a "dictatorship of the minorities" (RSI, 2024b).

March 2024

In response to the widespread opposition, the Foundation opted to temporarily maintain the use of blackface for the 2024 edition of the Processions. However, it also announced plans to launch a public debate to determine a shared approach regarding the future representation of the Mori (RSI, 2024c). If such a public debate ever took place, it happened secretly as it went completely unreported in the press, as the topic slowly disappeared from the daily news as Easter approached.

Easter 2024

When Easter week finally came and the press had stopped wondering whether having the Mori in blackface in the Procession was indeed a racist practice or if it was just an americanata (something that comes from the US, usually meant with a derogatory and mocking intent), a temporary solution came from the sky: because of heavy rain, the event was cancelled, thus giving the organizers and the people a second chance to rethink the importance of the Mori 's skin colour in this tradition.

January 2025

In January 2025, the topic appeared yet again in the press, this time to report that the foundation's council had decided to continue allowing the use of blackface for the upcoming edition of the Mendrisio Processions (La Regione, 2025). Meanwhile, the Association of Africans Residing in Switzerland and Europe is considering taking legal action, potentially bringing the case before the European Court of Human Rights (RSI, 2025).

In a radio interview, an expert mentioned that the tradition of painting the Mori black is proven to have been part of the Processions since at least 1874, although it likely goes back even further. It might be argued that it is not that long ago, for an event that has supposedly taken place without any interruption for at least 400 years. Then again, it might also be argued that the late 19th century was also characterized by the presence all over Europe, Switzerland included, of the dehumanizing human zoos and racial caricature and imagery. In these ways, the impact of colonialism on daily life and European culture was probably at its highest during this period. The legacy of this time still influences the local culture today, and it might be a reason why the defence of blackface practices have been so strong and enduring. The connection between Switzerland and its colonial past, as well as the debate on decolonization have been publicly addressed only recently by the Federal Commission Against Racism (Brunschwig Graf, 2023).

By the end of January, the news on this discussion did not take up the same amount of space in the media as in the previous year, and it quickly disappeared from the press as the argument was settled without a debate: the practice was not at all the same as the racist US blackface, and therefore the UNESCO-listed event in Mendrisio was going to proudly display its Mori once again.

Easter 2025

Despite the apologist and defensive stance taken by the foundation's council to continue this practice of anti-Black racism, for the second year in a row Easter week has been hit by heavy rain and the Historic Processions could not take place. Perhaps this offers us a third chance to rethink the use of this practice and question even a most deeply rooted and cherished tradition like this to finally realize that harmful stereotypes and racist power dynamics weaken our society and should have no place in the celebration of cultural heritage.

Methodology

Overview of data sample, collection and analysis

This interdisciplinary, year-on-year study reviews online and in-store products, and to what extent those products evoke racist depictions of Black people through usage of (Zwarte) Piet. Due to being longitudinal in nature, the study has also been able to capture the evolution of the use of this character over the course of a decade. The research employs a systematic mixed methodological process, where we use quantitative online data collection of Sinterklaas products, based on analysing the imagery on and/or in products from the same set of stores year-on-year, producing a statistical dataset. Alongside the quantitative data collection and analysis, our study teams conduct neighbourhood-based, incidental participant observation⁸ throughout the Netherlands (17 locations in 2024), and take digital pictures of the Sinterklaas merchandise they come into contact with during their everyday routines. Additional observations are carried out at more general shopping areas (outside of the specified research target) in order to broaden and contextualize the findings. Meanwhile, the online data collection uses information available from the websites of 12 stores. Our online sample currently consists of four supermarkets, two drugstores, three department stores, a toy store, a confectionery chain and online marketplace bol.com, which broadly cut across the Dutch commercial sector in order to offer representative results of what the general commercial offering is for Sinterklaas merchandise. The online search for Sinterklaas products is triggered by using the terms “Sinterklaas” and “Piet” for each shop; each subsequent populating product is therefore recorded. Moreover, from the third report onwards (ERIF, 2018), we have undertaken (news media) desk research and interviews with active anti-racism campaigners in order to provide an important socio-political context for our empirical research results.

The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data collection is consolidated by a grading system to assess each of the products reviewed for the study. Data collection and analysis takes place throughout the Sinterklaas period in the Netherlands (October to December) each year. A grading system (1 to 8, see Table 1) is employed by data collectors to assess the available products and visible advertisements on a given store’s website; the same grading system is used to analyse the digital media obtained from the in-store fieldwork team.

Grade Code	Grade Description
1	No Piet character visible on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
2	Silhouette/shadow of a Piet-like figure on Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
2a	Piets presented as (cartoon and/or stuffed) animals and/or other non-human creatures, on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
3	White Piet (either real person or cartoon) with no face-paint of any kind on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
4	Multiple Piets portrayed by or as having (cartoon or real) any racialized identity (incl. white!), with no face paint of any kind, on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
4a	Women (and/or girl-gendered children), or men (or boy-gendered children) of colour (i.e., non-white) dressed up as Sint (real or cartoon). These depictions can be accompanied by Piets portrayed by/as having any racialized identity.
5	White Piets (real or cartoon) with “sooty” faces on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
5a	Non-white Piets (real or cartoon) with “sooty” faces on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.
6	Multi-coloured (with the use of face-paint) Piets (real or cartoon) on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.

⁸ This was greatly reduced during the winter 2020 fieldwork period due to COVID-19.

7	Real or cartoon Piets (exclusively and explicitly) portrayed as having African features or by Black people, with a traditional Piet costume, with no white Piets presented. Only when analysing cartoons, includes caricature references.
8	Real white people only (i.e., in photographs) wearing blackface to portray Zwarte Piet, with exaggerated stereotypical, racist features on/as Sinterklaas-specific products, packaging or advertising.

Table 1. Grading system used for analysis of Sinterklaas brands and products.

An evolving study design

For the validity and reliability of our year-on-year results and conclusions, our study teams have worked with the same stores, products and modes of data collection for each study, with only minor alterations to our techniques and analytical process as we went along. Our sample has gone through some notable changes, with certain stores leaving the study when their stores closed down. We also eventually added new stores to the study to accommodate this loss. Department store V&D was only part of the study for the first year (ERIF, 2016); Marqt, Xenos and Etos joined the study by our third report (ERIF, 2018), although we collected no online data at all for Etos and Marqt for the 2019 report; supermarket PLUS was added to the study at this stage to constitute the drop in data. 2019 was also the research cycle where Marqt and toy store Bart Smit left the study due to mass closures of both stores (Parnell-Berry et al., 2020). After this final shake up, the online data sample for our study has remained the same, although this report will probably be the last with data from Blokker due to its recent closures⁹. Currently we collect both online and in-store data systematically from 12 stores. Table 2 shows the spread of stores throughout the years of the study.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Albert Heijn										
Jumbo										
PLUS										
Ekopla za										
Marqt										
HEMA										
Blokke r										
Kruidv at										
Etos										
Jamin										
Interto ys										
Bart Smit										
Xenos										
V&D										

⁹ If we are unable to continue collecting data from Blokker for future study cycles, we will look to replace the store with high-end department store Bijenkorf, or supermarket Dirk.

bol.co m									
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Table 2. Stores included in the study, 2016-2025.

Besides the sample adjustments, we have also made small modifications to the search terms we use, adding in the search term “Piet” systematically from 2022 online fieldwork onwards (Kerkhoff-Parnell & Kerkmeijer, 2023). We discovered during the previous research cycle that certain stores did not tag their Piet-specific products under the “Sinterklaas” search terms (particularly Blokker and bol.com), and therefore revised our research design and approach to online data collection to account for this. The grading system itself has evolved from 10 codes, up to 12 and back down again to the current 11 codes in order to accommodate legitimate shifts in the market. Furthermore, as we sought to formalize the study into something sustainable and transferable, we revised and calibrated the way we applied the codes to products so that the grading system would retain its applicability over time. In terms of in-store participatory data collection, we continue to recognize how valuable these additional qualitative insights are from across the country, in order to validate and complement what we are able to collect online. Often, what a store claims to sell (based on their online assortment) is consistent with the given brand’s value statements. Nonetheless, local (and especially franchised) stores at times continue to either sell offensive products and/or decorate their stores with harmful imagery. Hence, in-store visits and observations remain essential to our study to capture the real story.



Figure 5. Map of in-store data collection locations (2024).

Moreover, our fieldwork teams visit other neighbourhood stores to consider the broader narrative and contexts of how Sinterklaas is celebrated, sold and shopped. This report shows data was collected in 17 locations across the Netherlands between October and December 2024 (see Figure 5). While data has incidentally been collected from Antwerp, Brussels and Lille (the former two cities being in Belgium where Sinterklaas is also celebrated, and the latter having a large HEMA store in its city centre), we intentionally plan for data from the Netherlands only. We encourage data collection from all 12 Dutch provinces, and sponsored fieldwork trips to more rural parts in the very north and south

of the country in 2022¹⁰ (Kerkhoff-Parnell & Kerkmeijer, 2023). We believe this ensures our results and conclusions are as representative as possible; more so than if only collected in large cities in the west of the country. At the same time, we have become increasingly cognisant of Zwarte Piet fatigue among our fieldwork teams, which impacts their engagement during participant observation. To address this and deepen the richness of our data collection, we introduced a survey targeted at our fieldworkers to further capture their observations and impressions. This year's survey outcomes are explored in our main Results chapter.

¹⁰ This extended fieldwork was partially funded by the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) 2022 Empowerment and Resilience Scheme, financed by the ENAR Foundation.

Black Pete and a tradition rooted in violence: Sociological perspectives on the most celebrated children's holiday in the Netherlands

Ashley Melcherts

What does it mean to be Black in a country that has been in denial of its own racism? What happens when racism becomes part of the public debate and is being addressed as something that is negotiable? As a Black Surinamese Dutch woman who was born and raised in the Netherlands, I have come to understand Dutch racism as something that people claim does not exist, something that is not as bad (as in the US), and as explicit violence expressed through bullying, harassment, assault or so-called jokes. How this is expressed by a majority of the Dutch population, feeds into the Dutch cultural archive that speaks of exceptionalism. Black Surinamese Dutch scholars Philomena Essed and Gloria Wekker discuss this interplay of these different beliefs and behaviours regarding what racism was or is in the Dutch context. Wekker reminds us that for a majority of the Dutch population, there is a shared imaginary of the Netherlands as a country that is tolerant, in which race and racism do not exist (Wekker, 2020).

Ironically, the tradition of Sinterklaas, the most celebrated children's holiday in the Netherlands, fundamentally goes against this belief of Dutch exceptionalism. It demonstrates explicit racial and colonial violence packaged as an innocent children's holiday and shows that, just as how racism is rooted in for example the US, racism is rooted in Dutch society, too (Blakely, 1998; Essed, 2018; Wekker, 2020). For a majority of people growing up in the Netherlands, Sinterklaas has been promoted as a children's holiday that seems innocent, and magical at a glance, but is actually a holiday that perpetuates a cycle of harmful stereotypes and white supremacy. I want to lay out how violence is rooted in Sinterklaas and its racist caricature Zwarte Piet (Black Pete), and explore ways of reimagining this holiday based on my rejection of the celebration of Sinterklaas as a whole.

Currently living, studying and teaching in Mississippi, I approach my relationship with Sinterklaas from an insider-outsider perspective. Informed by my sociological training and my experiences as an international PhD student in the US, I try to bridge two of my worlds to gain deeper understandings of who I have become, and what that means for how I engage with the holiday of Sinterklaas. I have carefully thought about the connections between my youth experiences celebrating Sinterklaas, and my current lived experiences of the rejection of Black Pete and Sinterklaas. By living in the US for almost six years now, I have been a part of a close-knit university campus community in a state with an overt racial history in the heart of the deep south. Since this overt racial history is linked to a geographic location far away from home, many Dutch people are able to recognize the US as a racialized society: a society in which race is a central organizing feature (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). But this one-dimensional way of understanding racism hinders many Dutch people from recognizing the Netherlands as a country in which structural and individual forms of racism exist, too (Essed, 2018; Wekker, 2020). Whenever I discuss racism—specifically related to the oppression of Black people—with my professors, peers and my students in the Mississippi classroom, there lives a general understanding of the rejection of blackface. In the US, a country in which overt racism is baked into everyday life, I have experienced disapproval of openly racist caricatures that we deem to be of the past. So, whenever I bring up Black Pete to demonstrate an overt expression of racism in the present day in the Netherlands, a country that is not known or recognized as having a racial history, the people I encounter here are shocked. How does this disapproval match the denied racial history of Sinterklaas?

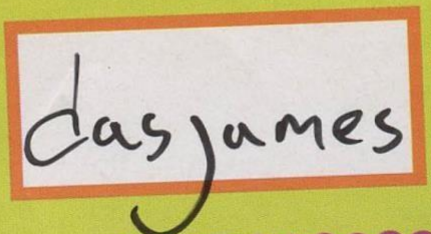
I find inspiration in the work of Black US scholars such as influential sociologists W. E. B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells-Barnett to look into this. Du Bois' concept of the colour line, the hierarchical relation between the white racial group and people of colour (Du Bois, 1903/1989), reveals the colonial dimension surrounding Sinterklaas based on the prescribed appearances and roles. Sinterklaas is portrayed as an old wise white man, who is seen as a father figure and the boss, whereas Black Pete is the Black funny helper who serves Sinterklaas and does all the work (Wekker, 2020). These depictions are linked to the roles between Black and white people during slavery. This dimension shows that the unequal power structure from earlier times is visible in contemporary Dutch society, but in this case, disguised as an innocent children's holiday. It is a disguise, because there are still children who are being mocked, called ugly and dirty, because others say they look like Black Pete (Garen, Carleton & Swaab, 2020), and this shows the symbolic status of white people over people of colour. Therefore, we cannot separate Black Pete from its racial history, because this racial history explains its existence in the Netherlands and the resistance against it.

Furthermore, Wells-Barnett's systematic analyses of the lynching of Black people in the US deep south, help us reveal the embodiment of domination that is also rooted in Sinterklaas, through the words that many white Dutch people use to defend this holiday. By analyzing white newspaper accounts, Wells-Barnett used the words of the oppressors against them and was convinced that this is what the oppressed must do (Wells-Barnett, 1895). The words the dominant white Dutch group use to describe and defend the existence of Black Pete come forth mostly out of their passion for the Sinterklaas celebration. Among many Dutch people, the constant excuse of: "it is our tradition", "it is a children's holiday"

and “Black Pete is Black because of the chimney” serves to claim the innocence of the celebration. Wells-Barnett describes passion that fuels domination, as an extreme emotion that desires absolute control (Wells-Barnett, 1895). This passion is so strong because many white Dutch people see the Sinterklaas celebration as part of their identity (Wekker, 2020). But if Black Pete is black because of the chimney, why does he come out of the chimney with black curly hair, golden earrings, red lipstick and a (fully) black painted face? Why are Black people, and Black children specifically, being compared to Black Pete through his appearance reflected in the black painted face and/or Black features? If Sinterklaas is a children’s holiday, it should be a happy time for all children and not just for white children. If something is a tradition, that does not mean that it cannot change over time.

The existence of the racist caricature of Black Pete as helper of Sinterklaas signals widespread ignorance among many of the Dutch population. Drawing attention to how we, as racially minoritized members of Dutch society, experience Sinterklaas is crucial. Many white Dutch people do everything they can to defend Black Pete and even use physical violence (Garen, Carleton & Swaab, 2020). This indicates how the holiday of Sinterklaas ensures that Dutch children are at the centre of an intergenerational transfer of justified violent behaviours and thinking patterns. Ideas of what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad and what is fun and what is not, are warped into understandings of Dutch culture as superior (Wekker, 2020). The Netherlands can do no wrong, therefore we should accept to continue a tradition that is rooted in racial and colonial violence. We have systemically separated a symbolic blackface caricature from its racial past, which is why many people will continue to internalize the ideas of Dutch culture as superior and the celebration of Sinterklaas as innocent (Wekker, 2020).

As a child I celebrated Sinterklaas with my family, too. It is ingrained into Dutch culture, and just like my parents, many people came to the understanding that taking part in this holiday ensures that their children are not socially excluded (more than they already are). The promotion of Sinterklaas as an innocent children’s holiday, which serves as a beacon of Dutch culture, makes many internalize the belief that this holiday can do no harm. But putting together the racial and colonial pieces demonstrates the true colours of this beloved tradition. Would we slowly but surely be able to move away from the violence that is rooted in this tradition? I believe we can. Thanks to the leading efforts of the Kick Out Zwarte Piet (Kick Out Black Pete) campaign (Wekker, 2020) and the work of the European Race & Imagery Foundation (ERIF) with their Sinterklaas study, progress has been made in changing the appearance and representation of Black Pete. But would we also dare to reimagine what this children’s holiday stands for, and what it could look like in the future? If it is truly about the children, would a celebration of Kinderdag (children’s day) be sufficient and something we can grow into? Suriname has nationally recognized Kinderdag on December 5th (Waterkant.net, 2019), which does not mean that Sinterklaas has completely vanished, but it is important to take note of, since Suriname is a former colony of the Netherlands. This too helps us understand the connections between Sinterklaas and its racial and colonial past. We have to work towards dismantling violence collectively, and challenging a children’s holiday that many of us celebrated when growing up is one way to do that, showing how we as people can grow.



P. 1 THE SONG

There is a scene in the US Christmas classic "White Christmas" that haunts me.

Directed by Michael Curtis, this film from 1954 centers around two entertainers who return home after the war in search of success in work and love. As with any film there is a plot – a rising action, a climax, a falling action – but it is not the plot that haunts me nor the love story that this film is centered around but rather the film's final scene – the last three minutes and thirty seconds.

The entire scene takes place on stage in what is a Christmas Eve show. A small elegantly dressed orchestra begins playing as beige curtains open up revealing a decorated stage. A big Christmas tree stands in the center. Children dressed in Christmas-red-and-white robes ritualistically flank both sides of the tree as the film's four main characters enter from the stage's right. They are the only adults on stage, yet they are dressed like the children. Only the young ballerina in her all-white gown is dressed differently. Everyone is white. Lithe on her toes, the ballerina springs up to the sound of lilting flutes. Bing Crosby's blue eyes and Rosemary Clooney's blonde hair almost seem to glow as the first words roll off their lips:

**I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
Just like the ones I used to know
Where the treetops glisten and children listen
To hear sleighbells in the snow
I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
With every Christmas card I write
May your days be merry and bright
And may all your Christmases be white**



A choreography goes along with the song (it is a play after all). The children mechanically move together as the four adults chant behind them. Eventually, the performers begin their final refrain of the song and the camera begins zooming out from the stage. As the camera exposes the space so it reveals the audience. Everyone is white. They stand up, joining in on the song they all now seem to know so well, toasting one another as they proudly sing together. The movie ends with these final words:



May your daaaaays be meeeerrrrrry and briiiiiiiiiiiiiiight
And may aaaaall youuuur Chriiiiistmaseeeesssss beeee whiiiiiiiiiiiiite



This scene haunts me because I feel as if I am watching something I was not supposed to see. Like I am peeping through a hole cut out from a wall built by one of the people I am looking at. I watch this scene and I wonder what runs through the performers' heads as they look upon their audience singing their song: ***do they wonder if their words are merely metaphor or something more immediately tangible? Do they see what my brown uninvited eyes see? If they do, do they even care?*** In the end all this scene purports to portray is a gathering of attractive and affluent white folk who are just trying to have a good night. Why should they care? These people aren't hurting anybody. In a way, it actually is quite innocent. But for me there is nothing innocent about this gathering. A song elicits celebrations. The glasses clink for preservation. And these people will go home, merry and bright, knowing (consciously or unconsciously) that their dream has come true.



P. 2 THE SHOCK

I dated a Dutch girl one summer a few years back. During one of our first dates, she asked me *"What is the most culture shocking moment you've had since coming to The Netherlands?"* Okay... How was I to answer this right then, right there? A pause - *"Probably that nobody gets my Spongebob references,"* fell out of my mouth. It's a true enough answer, but to say that it's the "most shocking moment" would be quite the hyperbole. But at that moment I honestly did not know. It was only a few days later, when she uttered the words *"Sinterklaas"* that I remembered what my most culture shocking moment was...

It was 2019; my first autumn in Europe. The days were shorter, the sky was greyer, the air colder. This transition into winter was a new experience for my Southern California self.

I was a d a p t i n g .

Biking home from the Academy one sunset in late November I happened upon a large crowd forming near Grote Markt. People stood in anticipation. They wore smiles on their faces as jovial music played in the distance. *"A parade!"* I thought. The music was getting closer, louder. I parked my bike and took my place among the audience, another spectacle so woefully ignorant to what was coming.

They came down the street. The road was blocked off for them, for these ugly painted faces in their foul fucking costumes. Their faces were black, their lips red, but you could see the blue in their eyes. You could see the white of their teeth as they laughed. They laughed often. *What the fuck was going on? Where the fuck was I?* I looked around to see if anyone was also as shocked as I was, if anyone as flabbergasted to see this archaic racist caricature living, breathing, laughing (!!) in our faces. But everyone else appeared to be enjoying the show. It seemed like I was alone.

And that was my shock - not the blatant blackface parade, but the complicity and my resulting self-perceived insanity caused by my disgust. Because juxtaposed against the audience around me, I was the outlier. I was the one not having the good time. The one ruining the party. The kids were getting their candies and the adults their entertainment. These painted faces passing out sweets weren't really hurting anyone, right? In a way, it was almost innocent. I realized I wasn't supposed to be here.

I stayed observing, head still spinning. The White Power procession eventually passed and the crowd dispersed. I got back on my bike and continued on home.

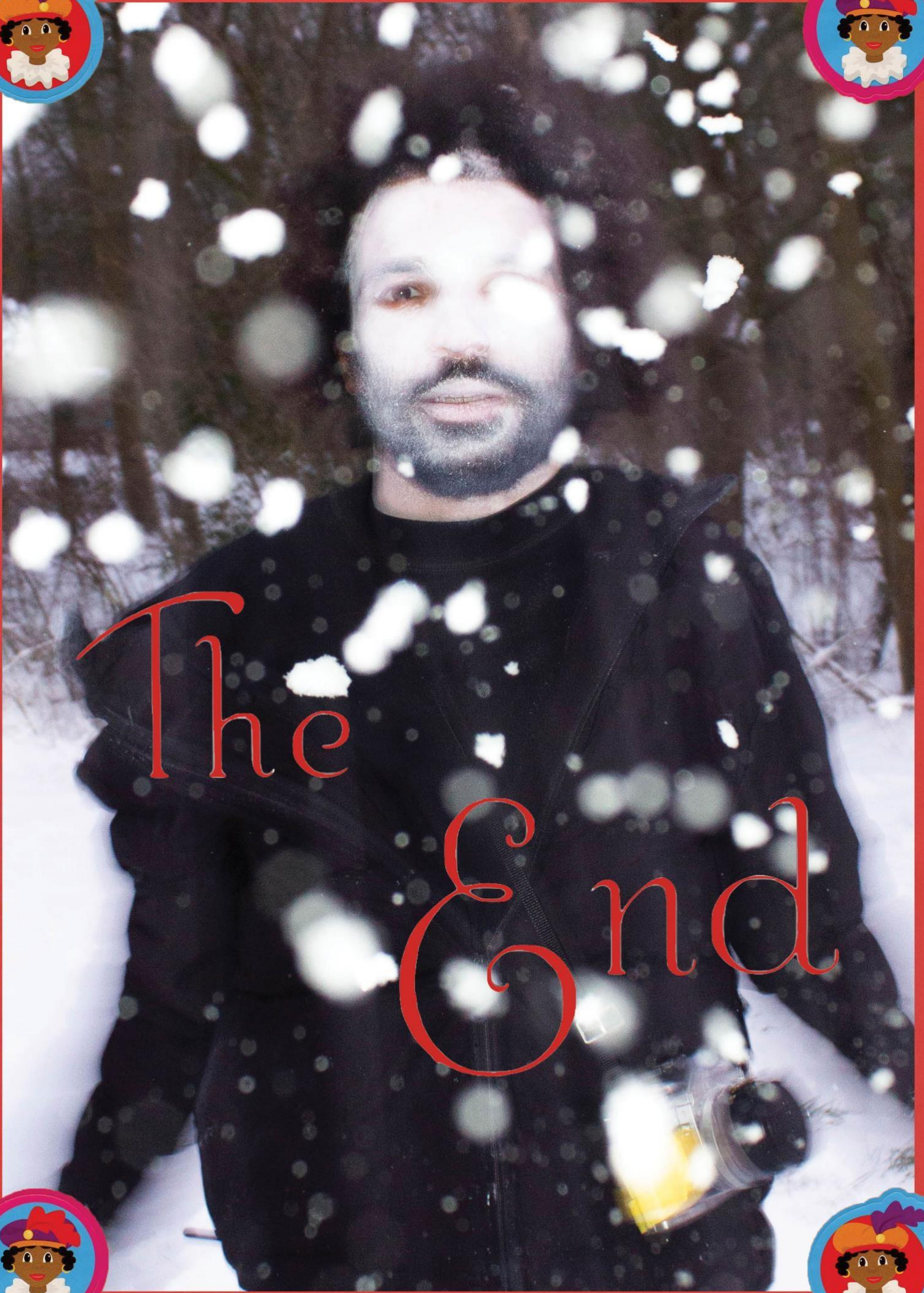
In my second year at the academy, we had an assignment called "The Fictional Other." I decided that I would do whiteface.

My intention with the work was to do a performance in the likes of Pippilotte Rist, *Ever Is Over All*. My young art school self was hoping to fictionalize a self free from the racial constraints and consciousness that comes with being Black in this world. To go down the street, like Rist, carefree and confident in my new white face. Not walking but **s t r u t t i n g**.

The paint was applied one afternoon in February. It was terrifying to behold. I was nervous to walk outside with it on. But art waits for no one. So, on this very rare day of full snow my two roommates and I went out together to document this performance. My newly painted face eerily mirrored the landscape around me. The performance did not last long. After the work was done, we decided to stay outside and play in the snow. Fun was had and we made photos of us enjoying our time. Evening crept in quickly. I had almost forgotten about the paint on my face, until we stopped at a corner shop. With my roommates inside, I stood outside waiting until some boys from the neighborhood saw me. Under the street lamps, they looked at me quizzically, suspiciously. In my neighborhood, I always felt comfortable due to the fact that everyone looked like me. I was seen here. I was understood here. But in that moment these boys did not understand me. No, their eyes came to life under that light saying something I could not comprehend. The little I could translate made me unsteady. They exchanged quiet mischievous words with each other. Suddenly, they reached down making snowballs, running right at me. I backed away in fear as they threw them at me. They ran away laughing. I stood there sweating and shocked. They had missed, but the whole thing had shaken me. My roommates came out of the shop carefree, but I returned home with a full head.

Alone in my room, I looked through the video footage we had made earlier in the day. The confident and carefree self on screen was a joke in the heat of my present emotion. The freedom I was trying to portray by painting my face was a fiction. But those brown boys with their brown eyes, **that** was reality. I could not explain to them that this was an art project. I could not tell them that I that I didn't want to be white, that I loved my brown skin, that I was not ashamed, that I was just trying to be **p o l i t i c a l**. But the performance was over, the footage now void.

I eventually came upon the pictures we made when we were playing in the snow. All the images were light and comical except for one. I zoomed in to get a better look and had to pause to take it in. Oh, this image terrified me. It terrified me because even though it was me I was looking at, it did not feel like me. It was someone else - a being, a wraith, **a true fictional other**. But this someone was showing feelings better than I myself could convey. They were showing my feelings when I first looked at my painted face in the mirror that day, the same face when those boys ran at me with fistfuls of snow. They are the feelings that I had when I saw all those black painted faces that first November and realized I was alone. This someone is the brown eyes of the uninvited. A someone swallowed by whiteness, lost to it. The last lyrics to White Christmas, with none of the merry and none of the bright.



Results of the 2024 online and in-store data collection

Introduction

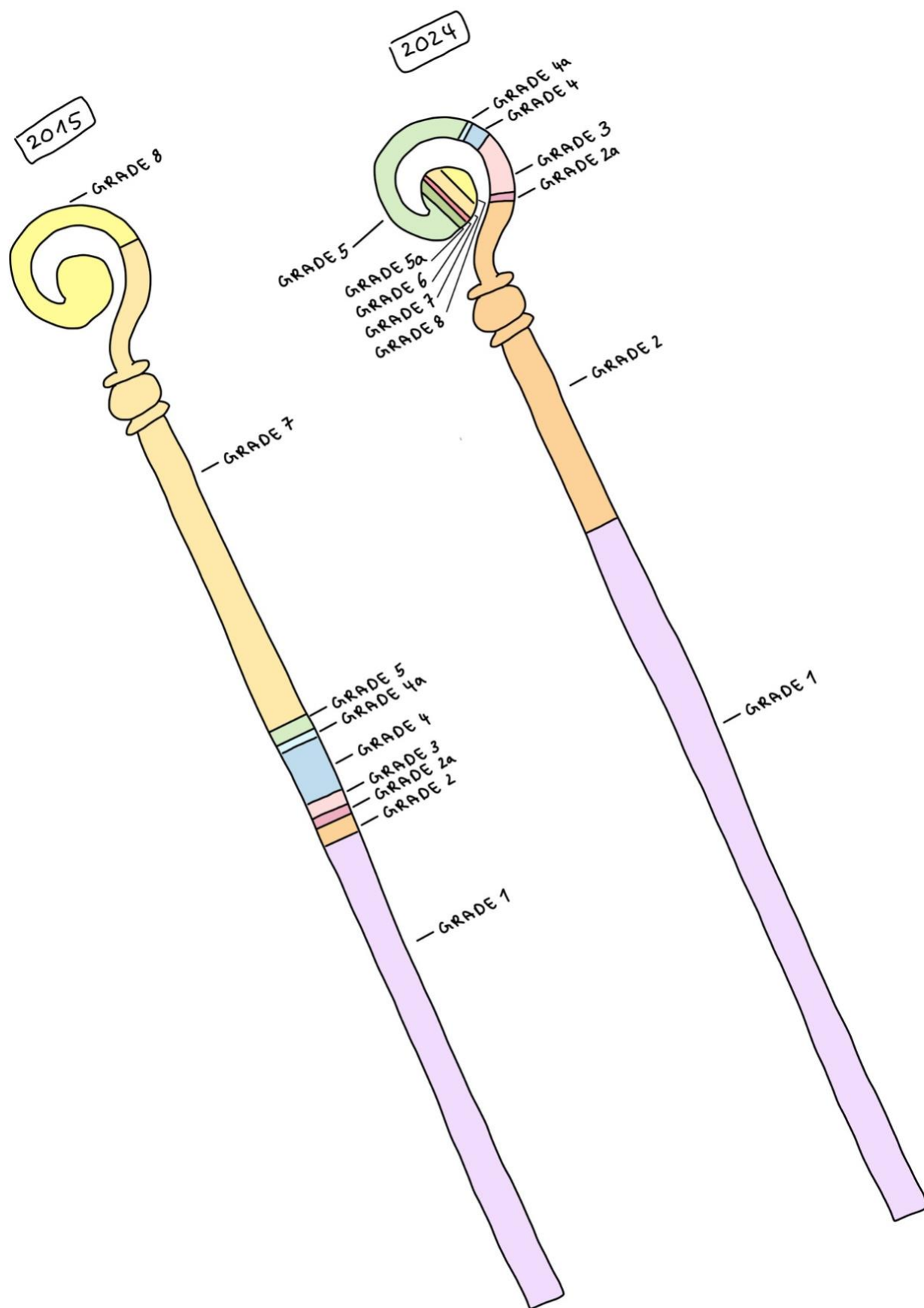
2024 sees no major changes in terms of grade share compared to the last three reports, and thus presents a continuation of what we've seen happening: online we recorded large shares of grades 1 and 2, while the combined share of grades 7 and 8 decreases. The situation in neighbourhoods tells roughly the same story, though more racist iterations of the Piet character are more visible here, as always. Other developments continue, too, like the encroachment of Christmas and Halloween (see also the Beyond the Stores section below), though we did notice this year that marketing for US import "Black Friday" in November is becoming more pronounced, and could therefore take more market space and influence in coming years. The wide variety of products (especially kruidnoten and chocolate letters) continues unabated, with an all-time high of 620 products analysed in our online research.

Changes 2023-2024

In 2024, we notice an increase in the grade 1 share again, after two years of decreasing following 2021, when the grade 1 share was at its peak with 62%. While the share for 2024 is not that high, the growth of grade 1 is nonetheless significant from just below 50% in 2023 to 55,5% now (see also Graph 1 in appendix A). The other two major grades (in terms of share) remain grade 2 and the combination-grade 5/5a. While these grades continue to hold the most significant shares behind grade 1, this report shows slight dips below their 2023 levels. Grade 2 drops from 22,8 in 2023 to 19,8% in 2024, ending the steady growth we have seen for this grade since 2021. The combined share of grades 5 and 5a drops from 14,4% to 12,8%. Meanwhile, the combined share of grades 7 and 8 continues to decline (as it has since 2019), from 3,9% to 3%. It has to be noted, though, that this drop is entirely caused by a decrease in the grade 7 share. We actually see a very slight increase in grade 8 (from 1,3% to 1,5%). We saw the same phenomenon last year. It is difficult to speculate on this as a trend, since the margins of increase are so small. We will have to await next years' results to see if this development continues and causes any societal impact. One final observation for this year is that grade 6 has almost disappeared (0,2%), with only one item recorded online as part of the bol.com data collection phase.

A recap of the past 10 years

When we take a look at overall developments of these main grades over the past 10 years, there are a few noticeable developments (see Graph 2 in appendix A). There are two key moments that seem to indicate larger than gradual shifts in the development of the portrayal of the Piet figure on products: 2017 and 2020 to 2021. In 2017, grade 1 shoots up, grades 7 and 8 see their combined share more than halved and we see the first rise of the "sneaky" Piet (grade 2) instead (ERIF, 2018). As noted in our report that year, the anti-Zwarte Piet movement peaked in the national consciousness around that time in both reach and effectiveness, causing both this development in stores as well as—unfortunately—a more serious racist backlash across the country (El Maslouhi, 2020; ERIF, 2019; Ommen, 2020; Ramanujam, 2018). In addition, we start to see brands and stores try out more different kinds of "Piet", as alternatives to the more obviously racist variants (grades 7 and 8). In 2020 and 2021, there is again an obvious rise in the share of grade 1. As noted in our subsequent 2021 and 2022 reports, we believe these results were connected to the global and viral Black Lives Matter movement. While this increase in overall share for grade 1 did push out the other grades (i.e., the green line in Graph 2, appendix A) to a certain extent, though this share has stabilized since then, we also see a steady rise in grade 2 share ever since, having a consistent position as the second largest share in our research and peaking in 2023. Meanwhile grades 7 and 8 have been steadily decreasing ever since their dramatic drop in 2017. The "sooty" grades (5 and 5a) have been the third largest share since 2021. Figures 6 and 7 illustrate all of this aforementioned movement from where we began with our first round of findings collected during Sinterklaas 2015, over to our most recent research cycle in 2024, which we explore in much greater depth below.

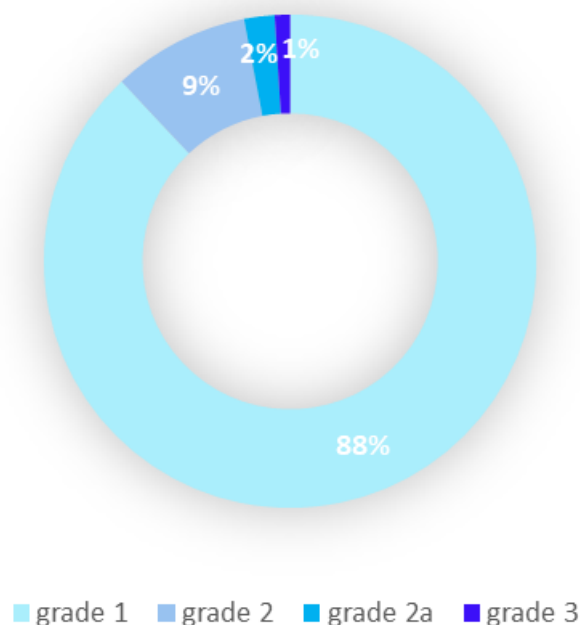


L: Figure 6. Total grade share 2015. R: Figure 7. Total grade share 2024.

Albert Heijn

“Alles voor het leukste feest van het jaar”

Albert Heijn stays relatively stable in 2024 compared to 2023. The supermarket shows the same four grades in almost the same ratio; grade 1 drops slightly from 91% to 88%, grade 2 goes from 7% to 9%, while grades 2a and 3 barely change (see Graph 3). Over recent years, our reports have commented on the explosion of kruidnoten flavours at supermarkets. We are seeing this trend with chocolate letters as well across several stores, including Albert Heijn. These flavours reveal the US influence, for example with “cookies and cream” kruidnoten available both in-store and online. Products are also being redeveloped using “cross-over” flavours, such as chocolate with pepernoten and kruitnoten, as well as stroopwafels and speculaas—all quintessentially Dutch flavours and ingredients to create something new and yet still familiar. More generally at this supermarket, analysis of Albert Heijn’s online assortment shows a shift in overtly festive Sinterklaas stylings to a more muted and Autumnal tone. In terms of edible figurines, taaitaai cookies used to be explicitly shaped as the Zwarte Piet character. In recent years this has changed and we record new efforts to make this product more Sint shaped.



Graph 3. Albert Heijn grade share (2024).

In-store observations for Albert Heijn did not reveal a broader range of grades this year (see Figure 8). In 2023, we saw some grade 7 decorations in Albert Heijn stores in smaller towns. The lack of these kinds of observations in 2024 could indicate that either shop owners and managers have become more wary of displaying racist decorations, thereby opting for more generic Sinterklaas materials (see Figure 9). Alternatively, it could be that our fieldworkers visited fewer small towns this year; we tend to record more “traditionally” racist versions of the Piet-figure in smaller, rural towns, as noted in previous reports. Venlo’s Albert Heijn XL hosted an extensive Sinterklaas display of mainly grades 1 and 3 products. In Eindhoven, the massive display featured various kruitnoten products prominently, especially from Van Delft. Packaging on display in Groningen put forward grade 1 kruidnoten most visibly, while Zwolle offered a much more mixed display in terms of (grade 1) product assortment (of course kruidnoten, but also sweets, chocolate letters and speculaas Sint staffs) as well as grade 3 Piet costumes. Utrecht offered a similar display featuring typical Sinterklaas products, including Kinder Surprise items. Lastly, the Albert Heijn in Amsterdam city centre featured rows of grade chocolate letters, especially by Delicata. Nestlé was also recorded both online and in-store; as a brand it is quite new to the Sinterklaas assortment.

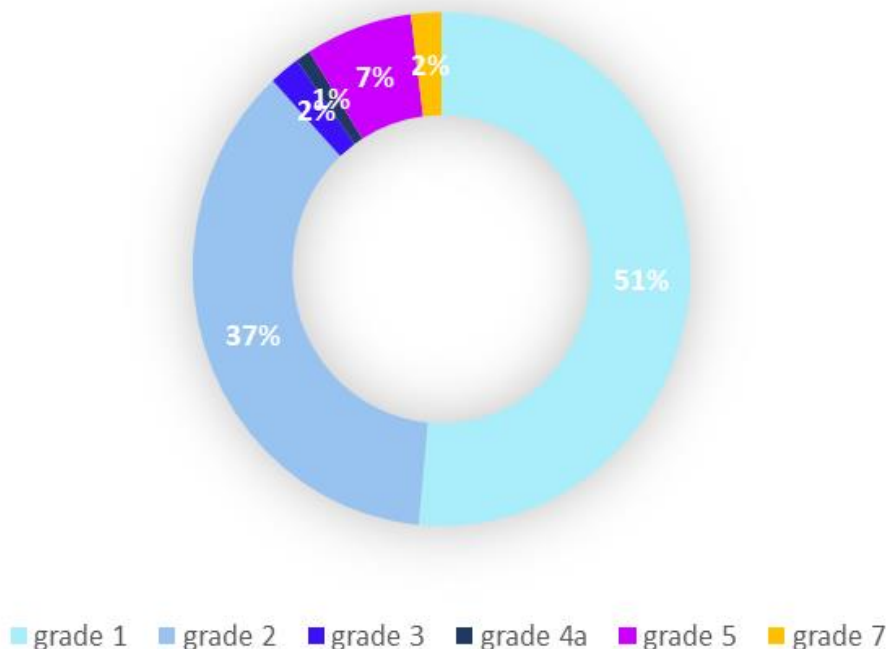


L: Figure 8. Grade 3 Piet costume at a Albert Heijn in Venlo. R: Figure 9. Generic Sinterklaas decorations at an Albert Heijn in Den Haag.

Jumbo

“Alles voor een voordelig Sinterklaasfeest. Bekijk sint assortiment, recepten en tips”.

Jumbo has seemingly reverted to its historical grade inconsistency according to 2024 data collection, following a brief period of less chaos in 2023. Again, we see a jumble of grades, as in earlier reports, though grades 1 and 2 still dominate for the supermarket chain (with 51% and 37%, respectively, Graph 4). This makes sense since Jumbo's house branding (exhibiting only grades 1 and 2) around Sinterklaas has not changed since last year's study cycle. The rise of the grade 1 share and relative fall of the grade 2 share for the supermarket is on trend for what we recorded more generally 2024. The grades that make up the remaining 12% of Jumbo's Sinterklaas-related products (3, 4a, 5 and 7) seem to come almost entirely from the “Toys, Books and Costumes” category, which contains many more products this year (10 against 1 last year). The exception is grade 7, which shows up not only as taaitaai, but also in a “decorate your own Speculaas Piet” (see Figure 10), a new product for the supermarket chain. All other food items are graded either 1 or 2 for online data collection and analysis.



Graph 4. Jumbo grade share (2024).



Figure 10. Grade 7 decorate-your-own-speculaaspop found on Jumbo's website.

In-store data collection for Jumbo resulted, like last year, in observations that differed from what we saw online, especially regarding decorations shop managers displayed in their franchised stores, such as this grade 7 doll in Goor (see Figure 11) and grade 5 doll in Zwolle (see Figure 12), both in the province of Overijssel. In Den Haag, one Jumbo used chocolate milk brand Chocomel's drink cartons to create a massive (grade 1) display in the middle of the store; the cartons were adorned with letters as a nod to Sinterklaas-themed chocolate letters, which are often given as a gift. Other Sinterklaas displays contained actual chocolate letters with grade 2 packaging and grade 3 children's Piet costumes. By comparison, a Jumbo in Eindhoven offered a more modest display using the supermarket's festival tagline to frame the display: and presenting all of the essential seasonal goodies (mainly as grade 1), especially chocolate letters. Kinder Surprise products are becoming more prominent, as are Sinterklaas advent calendars. In Utrecht, products by the brands Milka and Bastogne are seemingly the most prominent, as well as packs from both Jumbo and Koopmans to make your own products—these items used mainly grades 1 and 2 imagery. A rather large fireplace (decorated with grade 3 bunting) is featured surrounded by “gifts”, where kids can place a paper shoe and receive something from the store¹¹ (Figure 13). Lastly, in Groningen, in addition to the same essential Sinterklaas items seen at the other Jumbo stores, one of our fieldworkers also recorded the grade 7 taaitaai cookies we had reviewed online.



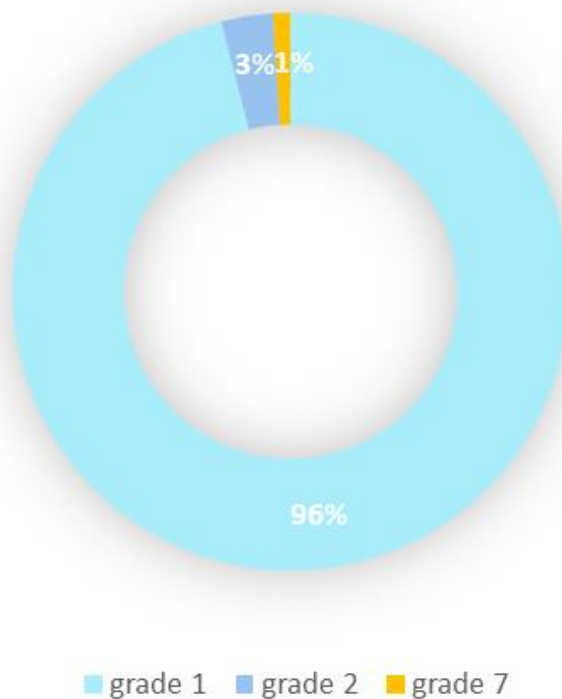
From left to right: Figure 11. Grade 7 doll at a Jumbo in Goor. Figure 12. Grade 5 doll at a Jumbo in Zwolle. Figure 13. Fireplace at a Jumbo in Utrecht.

¹¹ Placing a shoe and receiving a small present in it the next day is part of the Sinterklaas tradition.

PLUS

“Pak lekker uit met Sinterklaas”

Based on online data collection, supermarket chain PLUS has very similar results as in 2023, with almost exclusively grade 1 (96%) and a handful of grade 2 products (3%). See Graph 5. The only difference is the return of a grade 7 product, though it is not taaitaai, as we expected (Kerkhoff-Parnell & Kerkmeijer, 2024: 18). Instead, the grade 7 product we observed only in-store in previous years has finally found its way online to the official assortment. Chocolate Piet figurines like those found in Amersfoort, Baarlo and Olst (Figure 14). Further in-store observations did not yield any observations of other grades besides the aforementioned. An interesting observation, however, are the new “cheese letters” found in a PLUS in Rotterdam (Figure 15), which seem to point to a further diversification of Sinterklaas products in the supermarket chain with possibly the most Dutch product imaginable.



Graph 5. PLUS grade share (2024).



L: Figure 14. Grade 7 chocolate Piet figurines. R: Figure 15. Cheese letters

Ekoplaza

We found six products for Ekoplaza online in 2024, a definite increase from last year's single item, and more comparable to the years before (nine in 2022 and eight in 2021). It will come as no surprise, however, that all these products are

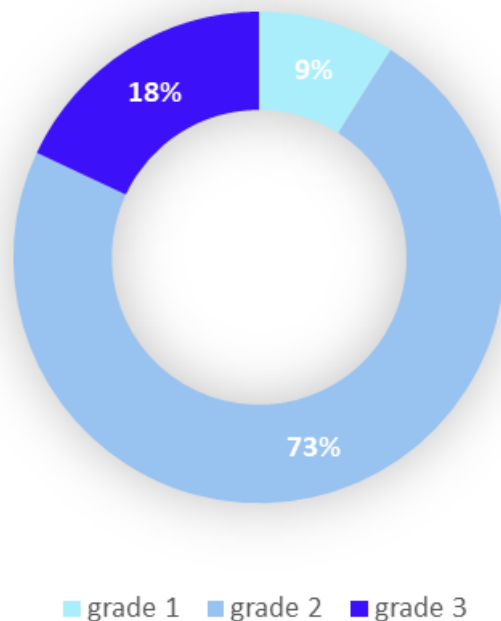
again grade 1. We did, however, find the same grade 2 kruidnoten product in-store as in 2023 (Figure 16), this time in the northern city of Groningen. Also, we found some more Sinterklaas-related decorations and activities, like the possibility for children to place an arts-and-craft paper shoe in the store, as was observed in Zwolle (Figure 17). These scenes illustrate why doing research outside of the Randstad region of the country is so important and valuable for this study.



L: Figure 16. Pepernoten at an Ekoplaza store in Groningen. R: Figure 17. Place your shoe area at an Ekoplaza in Zwolle.

Kruidvat

Two changes are apparent in the Kruidvat online data, too. Firstly, grade 1 is back after a two-year absence, although with a relatively small share (9%). Secondly, grade 5, a consistent presence in Kruidvat's data over the years has completely vanished. We surmise this is most likely because the promotion deal for the "Grote Sinterklaasfilm"—with its grade 5 imagery—stopped and was taken over by Blokker this year. Therefore, grade 2, typically seen on Kruidvat's home-brand chocolate letters and kruidnoten has completely taken over this year with a share of 73% (Graph 6).



Graph 6. Kruidvat grade share (2024).

In-store observations for Kruidvat, however, show more variety in grades, as has been recorded in previous reports. See for example these grades 1, 3, 5 and 5a products found in Kruidvat stores in Markelo, Eindhoven and Groningen. In Markelo, the typical grade 2 house-branding still dominates, but is accompanied by grade 1 Tony's Chocolonely chocolate letters and grade 5 Piet costumes. A Kruidvat in Eindhoven proved to be almost entirely grade 1-oriented,

with Sint figurines and candy staffs assessed in this way. Groningen offered lots of grade 5 colouring books and decorations, as well as grade 3 costumes. Additionally, we recorded grade 1 gift-wrap paper in Den Bosch and Utrecht. Overall, the branding and assortment for Kruidvat has not changed much over the years, though.

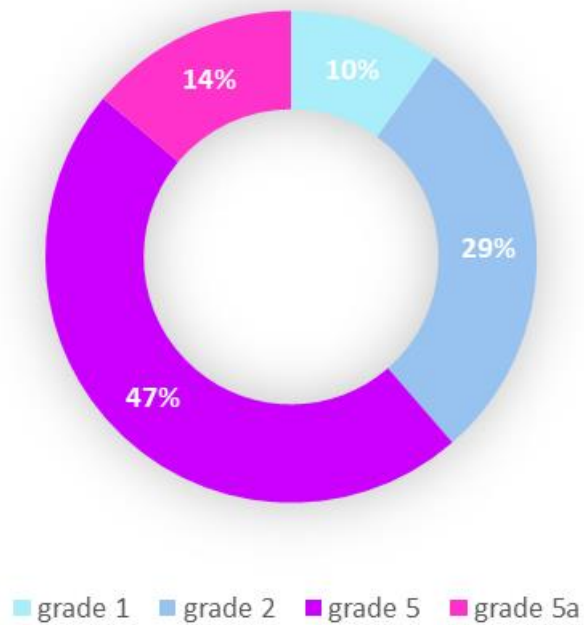


Clockwise: Figure 18. Grade 5 Sinterklaas costume in Markelo. Figure 19. grade 1 Sinterklaas display in Eindhoven. Figure 20. Grade 3 and 5 Sinterklaas finger dolls in Groningen. Figure 21. Grade 5+5a Club van Sinterklaas colouring book in Markelo.

HEMA

“Voor cadeautjes groot en klein, weet Sint wel waar hij moet zijn. Bij HEMA natuurlijk!”

HEMA also offers interesting results this year, albeit for different reasons. Its grade 1 share has dropped substantially from 2023 to 2024 (from 62% to 10%) to the advantage of grades 5 and 5a (up to 61% from 2023's 24% and 2022's 38%) (Graph 7). This seems entirely because of the decline in the number of food items we found online for HEMA (22 in 2023 compared to only five in 2024), which accounted for most of the grade 1 share in 2023, pushing the relative size of HEMA's strong home brand (grades 5 and 5a, Figure 22) up, since this branding is used overwhelmingly on their non-food items and the number of products in that category stays almost the same (16 against 15). This leads to HEMA going squarely against trend this year: higher grades 5 and 5a shares, a higher grade 2 share and a (much) lower grade 1 share. An interest aside is perhaps that as Jip and Janneke references become increasingly baked into HEMA's general brand imagery, so too do we notice these iconic Dutch storybook characters being further woven into HEMA's Sinterklaas marketing. This is a logical pairing as the department store seeks to position itself as the ultimate Dutch brand.



Graph 7. HEMA grade share (2024).



Figure 22: Sooty face-paint set, HEMA website.

In-store fieldwork did not result in any significantly differing observations, other than that we did come across some more grade 1 Sinterklaas food products, like chocolate letters in Rijswijk (see Figure 23), miscellaneous chocolates in Den Bosch (see Figure 24) and kruidnoten in Amsterdam (see Figure 25). Eindhoven offered similar scenes. The fact that these items were available in-store but not online indicates that HEMA is no longer invested in widely promoting these items as part of their Sinterklaas assortment. We will have to wait and see whether this will be a permanent choice. Meanwhile, Hardewijk's assortment of party supplies, costumes and toys also emphasized the grade 5 and 5a branding, as did the displays recorded in Groningen and central Amsterdam. The latter store used a massive display in the shape of a large boat—a reference to how Sinterklaas travels to the Netherlands; this type of display was also recorded in Zwolle and we have seen it in previous years in other places, too.



From left to right: Figure 23. Grade 1 Chocolate letters in Rijswijk. Figure 24. Grade 1 Sinterklaas themed chocolates in Den Bosch. Figure 25. Grade 1 Sinterklaas themed chocolates and kruidnoten in Amsterdam.

The only officially grade 7 product recorded was a speculaas pop in Den Bosch (see Figure 26), although it must be said that HEMA's grades 5 and 5b products increasingly cover the entire face with "soot", moving the depiction further into grade 7 territory. We will continue to follow this development closely.



Figure 26: Grade 7 Speculaaspop at a HEMA in Den Bosch.

Jamin

Jamin is back to its 100% grade 1 score, as we did not find a "monkey" chocolate letter again this year (Kerkhoff-Parnell & Kerkmeijer, 2024: 25). In-store research did not yield any different results from what we were able to collect online.

Blokker

"Sint winkelt bij blokker - de enige échte pietenpakjes"

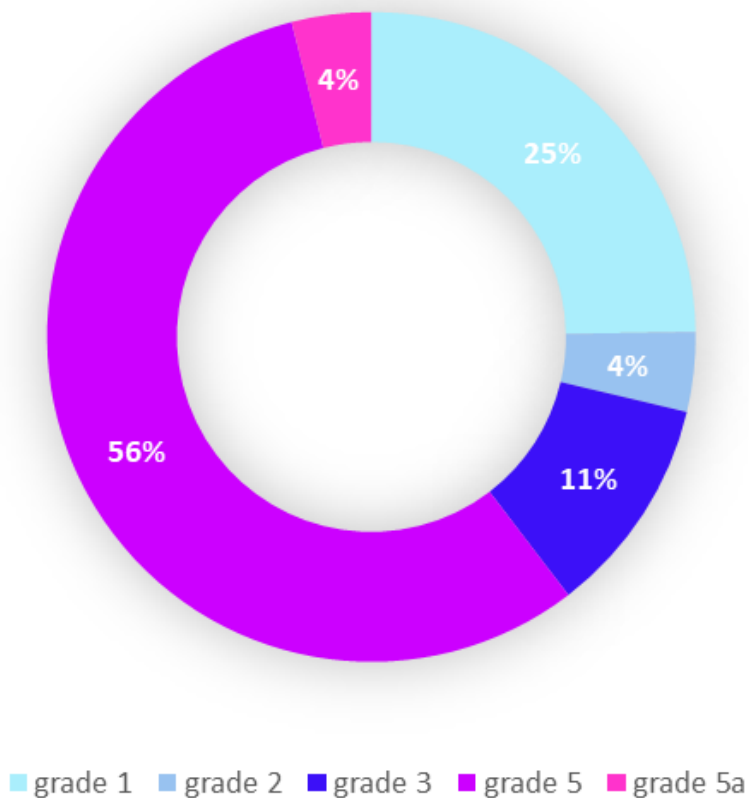
On the 13th November 2024, the Blokker management announced that after years of disappointing results, the chain was declared bankrupt. In a market where online shopping is bigger than high street and/or in-store shopping, it could not compete with digital retailers like bol.com and Coolblue. In the weeks following this announcement, most physical stores closed as did the Blokker webshop (Van Oosterhout, 2024; NOS, 2024b). These developments came in the same period we conducted our online fieldwork, and we noticed the consequences of Blokker's bankruptcy there immediately. Firstly, we only found 28 Sinterklaas-related products compared to 66 in 2023 and 60 in 2022, which perhaps indicates the webshop was already closing down during our research period. Secondly, we found no results online when using the "Piet" search term. Finally, most of the products that did come up for our search consisted of a deal Blokker made just prior to their bankruptcy for the promotion of the Grote Sinterklaasfilm, a yearly returning children's film series about Sinterklaas and "his" Piets (Emerce, 2024)¹². All Piet imagery around and from the series is grade 5 (see Figure 27).

¹² As noted above, Kruidvat previously held this contract.

All in all, this means the online results for Blokker show a very different picture than previous years (see Graph 8). Not only does Blokker show merely five grades against previous reports' eight or nine, and grade 5 accounts for more than half of the results (56%, due to the Sinterklaas film deal), it also shows no grades 7 and 8 in 2024. Blokker was always the major culprit (along with bol.com) for selling grade 8 Sinterklaas products. As for grade 7: Blokker was responsible for a large share of the total number of grade 7 products in our research—as much as half in 2023. Now, we accordingly see a relatively large drop in the grade 7 share overall: from 2,6% to 1,5% (see Graph 1 in appendix A).



Figure 27. Grade 5 promotional image for the *Grote Sinterklaas Film*.



Graph 8. Blokker grade share (2024).

In-store observations in Den Haag, Zwolle and Amsterdam-Noord did not show any other grades and confirmed the dominance of the Grote Sinterklaasfilm branded products at the Blokker stores that were still open at that time (see Figure 28).

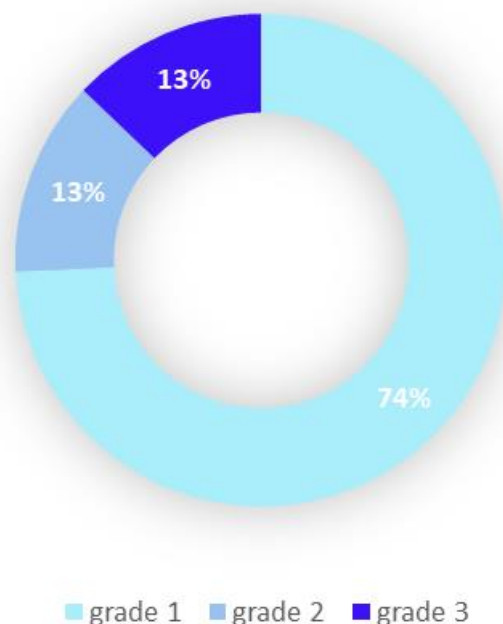


Figure 28. Grote Sinterklaasfilm products and decorations at a Blokker store in Amsterdam

What the future holds—at the time of writing this report in early 2025—remains unclear. Some franchise holders throughout the country are close to opening their stores again independently, and the chain is apparently still in talks for a takeover from external parties (Omroep West, 2025). The Blokker online shop, however, has been completely shut down. Thus, we will have to wait and see what happens and what this will mean for Blokker, and whether or not we will be able to feature it in our next report.

Intertoys

As is very on trend this year, data collection for Intertoys shows an increase in its grade 1 share from 50% to 74%, and decreases its grade 2 share from 25% to 13% (see Graph 9). Grade 3 is stable, while 2023's grade 5 products are eliminated entirely. Like last year, we found only eight Sinterklaas-related products; we reason this is because the toy store sells the products that parents buy for their kids for the Sinterklaas festival. Therefore, it does not necessarily need to sell products that are specifically Sinterklaas-themed. Nonetheless, in-store observations did find some differently graded products this year, with a grade 7 Piet in Groningen being the most notable (see Figure 29). The general store branding around Sinterklaas has not changed, and is still grade 2a (see Figure 30).



Graph 9. Intertoys grade share (2024).



L: Figure 29. Grade 7 Piet Costume in Groningen. R: Figure 30. Sinterklaas decorations at Intertoys, also in Groningen.

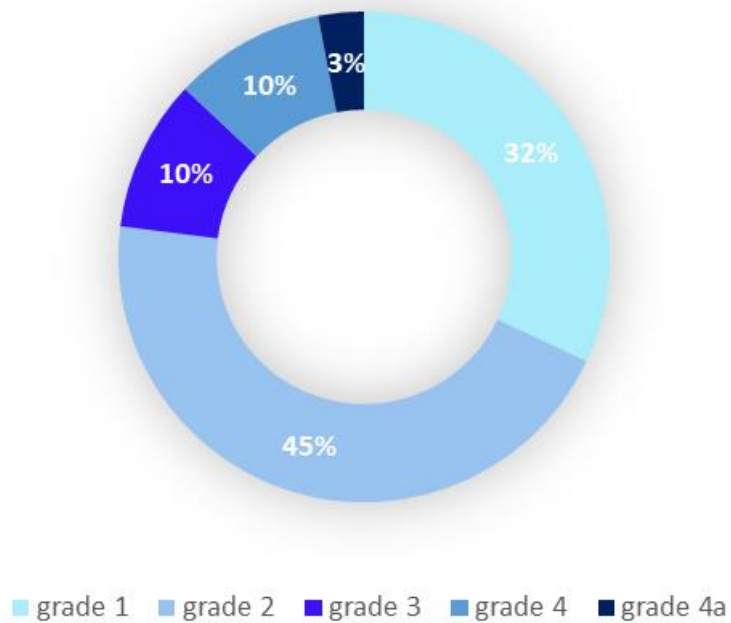
Xenos

“Vier Sinterklaas met Xenos. Ontdek ons assortiment en vind de leukste Sinterklaas cadeautjes!”

Our online data collection revealed no major changes in Xenos’ marketing and/or products for 2024. The department store chain’s sneaky, hiding Piet (grade 2) is still very present and is used in and on all of their main Sinterklaas-related products. It even seems to become the centre character of their Sinterklaas advertising in 2024, as evidenced by new products every year (see Figures 31 and 32) and its inclusion in advertisements for other products (see Figure 33). Interestingly, Xenos uses these products and their inherent characterisations of Sinterklaas and Piet to reinforce a specific dynamic and narrative around the festival. For instance, figurines from this range of products depict Sinterklaas pointing his finger to a name in his book, which stipulates who will or will not get a gift. Meanwhile, the Piet figurine is carrying the very large gift and presumably following the Sint’s directions, illustrating for consumers the clear role division and hierarchy between these two characters. All in all, this contributes to grade 2 maintaining the largest share of Xenos’ Sinterklaas product pie, with 45% (see Graph 10), although (and unlike at other stores in this study) grades 4 and 4a seem to be making some inroads. However, this is mostly because of the inclusion of the dice in multiple photos used to advertise other products (see also Figure 33). Finally, grade 6 has disappeared completely at Xenos, after two years of a clear presence, indicating a complete divestment from the multi-coloured or “rainbow” Piet narrative.



L: Figure 31. Grade 2 blown glass Piet ornament with feather. R: Figure 32. Grade 2 Piet and Sinterklaas figurines to put in plant or flower pots.



Graph 10. Xenos grade share (2024).



Figure 33. Advertisement for Sinterklaas mug with grade 2 and grade 4 imagery on Xenos' website

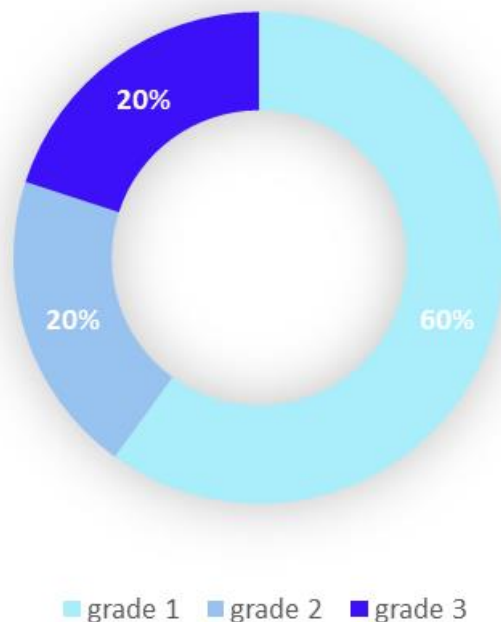
In-store observations did result in some products that were graded differently, like certain grade 5 products in Groningen and Zwolle (see Figures 34, 35 and 36). For the rest, including the fieldwork undertaken in Den Haag and Rijswijk, the findings are the same as online.



From left to right: Figure 34. Grade 5 Piet costume. Figure 35. Detail of grade 5 table cloth. Figure 36. Grade 5 paper cupcake moulds.

Etos

Drugstore Etos does not make a habit out of adding its Sinterklaas assortment to its online store. During our last research cycle, only five products were found online, which is more than 2023's three, but is still less than half of 2022's 12. Most of those products were grade 1 (see Graph 11). Though Etos was never pushing Sinterklaas products on a large scale, the chain seems to prioritize the festival even less these last two years, according to the online data collection.



Graph 11. Etos grade share (2024).

As with many of the stores featured in our study, in-store observations yet again uncovered certain products that were not for sale online, like this interesting grade 3 Sinterklaas-themed jewellery, recorded in Goor (see Figure 37). An Etos in Den Haag sold some grade 3 Piet costumes and decorated other generic items with Piet hats throughout the shop. This is similar to Den Bosch, where one could also observe grade 2 gift-wrap at the cash register. On the other hand, these Sinterklaas products are still few and far between, even in-store, and can come across as out of place and half-hearted, as evidenced by this somewhat random looking and very small Sinterklaas display in Rotterdam, featuring brands such as Bolletje, Tony's Chocolonely and Kinder Surprise. The products recorded are even combined with Christmas items (see Figure 38), which was also the case at an Etos in Groningen.



Figure 37. Grade 3 Sinterklaas themed jewellery in Goor.

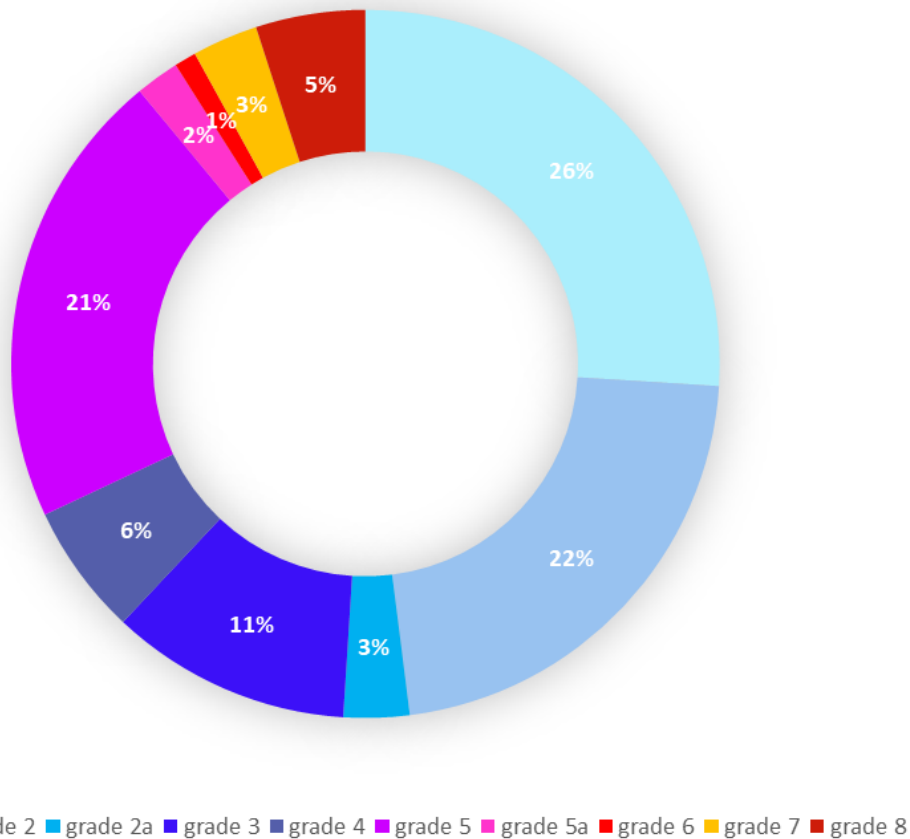


Figure 38. Messy Sinterklaas and Christmas products display at an Etos in Rotterdam

Bol.com

“Dank u Sinterklaasje - de leukste cadeaus”

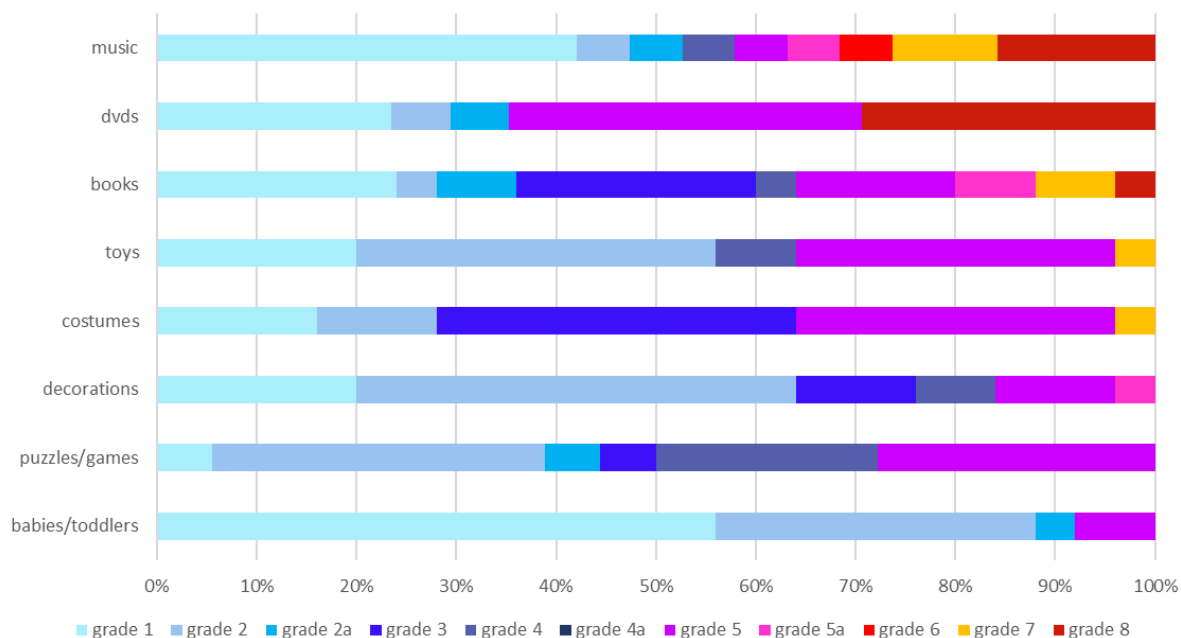
The grade distribution for bol.com webstore is relatively stable when compared to the 2023 results, though there are a couple of developments worth mentioning here. Firstly, this concerns the rise of the grade 2 share (from 12% to 22%, see Graph 12), which seems to push out grades 5 and 5a products (from 33% to 23%), as we speculated might happen in our last report (Kerkhoff-Parnell & Kerkmeijer, 2024: 30). Also notable is the doubling of the grade 4 share, making bol.com (along with Xenos) almost solely responsible for the grade's rise in share overall in 2024.



Graph 12. Bol.com grade share (2024).

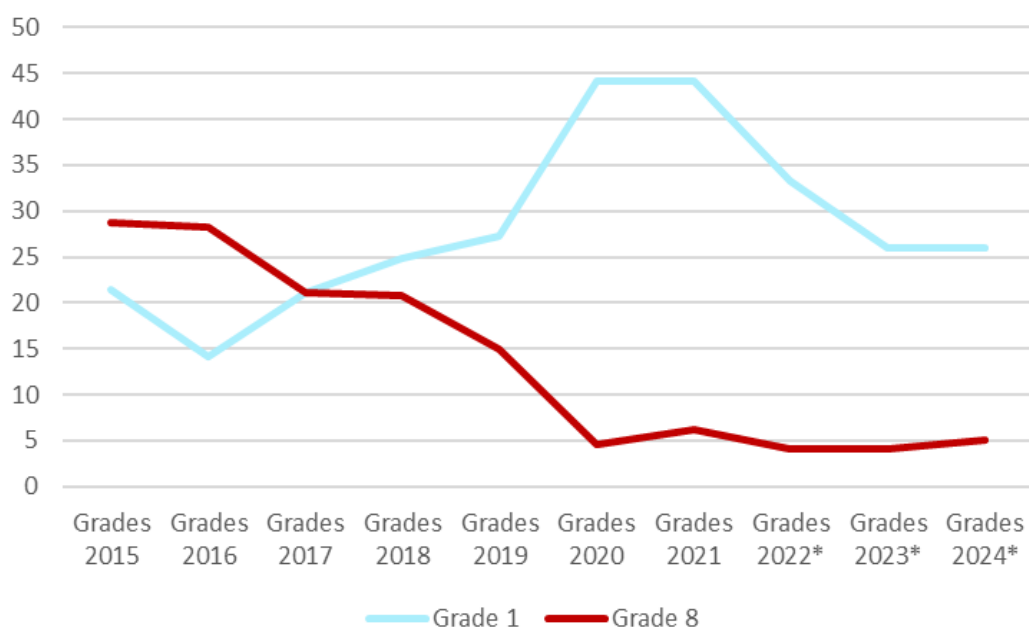
Furthermore, it is worth pointing out the growth in the grade 8 share at this webshop in 2024. While we still encounter the covered-up blackface pictures, the number of products with visible blackface imagery has risen from six to nine. Moreover, since Blokker had no grade 8 products this season, this means that the (very slight) rise in grade 8 share overall in the current report (from 1,3% to 1,5%) is caused by bol.com alone. We found grade 8 products mostly in the Music and DVD categories as usual, although we found an extra one in the Books category as well (see Graph 13). In the search results themselves, we noted more cross-pollination than usual between categories, e.g., costumes and decorations coming up when analysing the toy category. More so than in previous years, many non-Sinterklaas specific toys populated under a Sinterklaas toy search, implying they may have been tagged with “Sinterklaas” by bol.com to direct consumers shopping for children’s gifts towards certain products. This is similar to the way that Intertoys handles Sinterklaas gift-selling and marketing, as we note above.

Other noteworthy findings included how bol.com auto-corrects “Piet” for “pet”, which means “hat” in Dutch. Ironically, however, no Piet hats populated under this search. It’s no longer possible to select a Puzzles and Games category; there are now two separate categories though when using “Sinterklaas” as a search term for both, many of the same items populated.



Graph 13. Grade share per bol.com category (2024).

It is interesting to take a closer look at how bol.com, as a very consistent presence in our research and a very popular webshop—selling a wide range of different kinds of products—have changed their depictions of the (Zwarte) Piet character over the last 10 years of this research. It also is the only store in our research that has consistently sold grade 8 products. Examining the extremes of our analytical grading scale—grade 1 and grade 8—demonstrates how bol.com has responded to protests against blackface (see Graph 14). Firstly, it is striking how while grade 1 generally rises, grade 8 dips over the years, reaching their respective high and low points in 2020, during and after the global and viral Black Lives Matter demonstrations in response to police brutality and state violence against Black people. Interestingly, however, grade 1 went into decline again after 2021, seemingly finding its place around the 26% mark for our last two reports—much lower than the average of the rest of the stores combined (around 53% over that same period). Grade 8, meanwhile, has stabilized at around 4 to 5% after 2020, neither growing nor declining very much. We have reported in earlier publications how certain grade 8 products on the webshop are covered in various devious ways (for example, costumes)—as early as 2021. Nevertheless, the company seems to have given up on really pushing that tactic further, in order to completely rid the site of what they themselves define as unacceptable imagery. Taken alongside the lower grade 1 share, the urgency to actually confront and suppress blackface products and marketing seems diminished over at bol.com.



Graph 14. Development of grades 1 and 8 shares for bol.com (2015-2024).

Beyond the stores

In this chapter of the report, we explore the observational findings that were recorded outside of (and yet nearby) the main stores in our study. During the 2024 Sinterklaas season, we continued to record many of the same phenomena as shown in previous reports, including the interplay of Sinterklaas and Christmas marketing; the enduring use of grade 7 imagery in smaller, non-franchised shops; and more generally the pervasive popularity of the Sinterklaas festival in the Netherlands. This provides important social and marketplace context(s) for how to interpret the rest of the data.

Sinterklaas and Christmas

Generally, in our online data collection a lot of Christmas products populate with our “Sinterklaas” search term—an increasing trend we have seen grow year on year. On the other hand, after introducing the “Piet” search term to ensure we are able to record all Sinterklaas items, we see less Christmas-related merchandise. All the same, during in-store data collection, we often found Christmas products mixed up with Sinterklaas products, either intentionally as part of the same display, or unwittingly jumbled together as though part of the same festival. This was especially noted at Etos, as well as advent calendars at PLUS and Albert Heijn and stockings at Kruidvat. We noticed this trend outside of our usual fieldwork sample also.

Lush—the body care brand that has supported *Nederland Wordt Beter* in the past (Kerkhoff-Parnell & Kerkmeijer, 2022)—has started using elves in their window displays (see Figure 39) during the Sinterklaas period, indicating a pivot towards Christmas rather than the more traditionally Dutch festival. A Relay stationary store at Den Haag Central Station sold both Sinterklaas and Christmas children’s books as part of the same seasonal display (see Figure 40). The trend is pervasive: decorations in a bike store window in Amsterdam (see Figure 41); a display of Christmas products alongside typical Sinterklaas imagery at a PLUS in Rotterdam; similar scenes reported from a Xenos in Groningen. From this we can deduce that it is efficient for stores and brands to market both festivals alongside each other since they take place in the same month and have overlaps in terms of narrative and tradition. One could also imagine stores poking fun at the mindless consumerism associated with elaborate feasting and gift-giving twice in the same month for the same saint. Nonetheless, at this stage even as we see Christmas take up more space in the market and socio-cultural consciousness, we do not see it replacing Sinterklaas just yet.



L: Figure 39. Elf in holiday themed window display at a Lush store in Den Bosch. R: Figure 40. Sinterklaas and Christmas books at a Relay store on Den Haag Central Station.



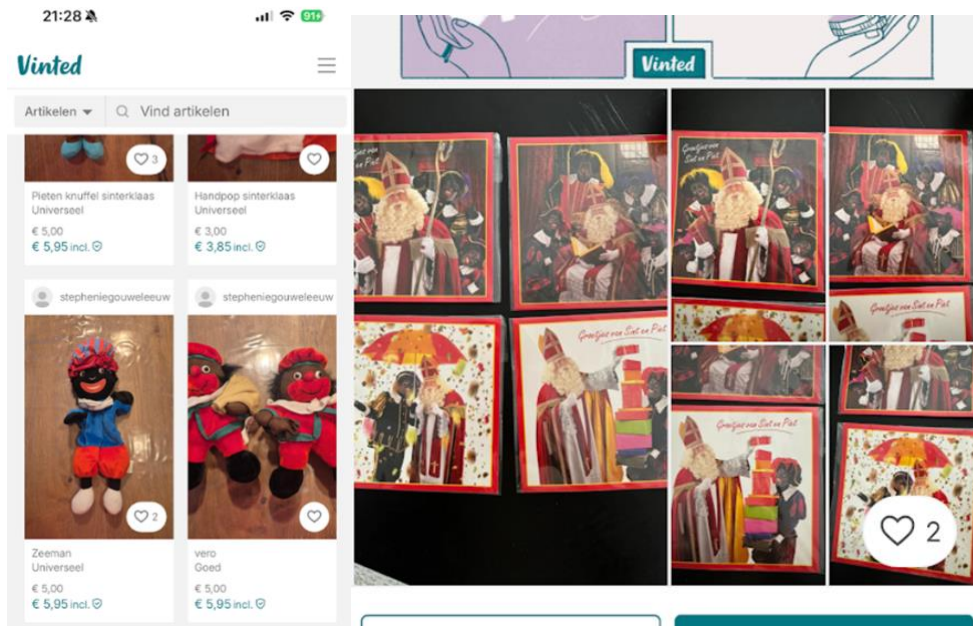
Figure 41. Window display at a bike store in Amsterdam.

Grade 7 and 8 Imagery

Still, smaller stores and especially bakeries, are once again guilty of the use of grade 7 imagery throughout the country, as exemplified by these observations in Den Bosch, Arnhem and Utrecht (see Figures 42, 43 and 44). Though, overall, Zwarte Piet has thankfully lost a lot of mainstream ground in the past decade, both consumers and businesses still find other ways of keeping grade 7 and 8 products in circulation. We see this is the case, even as such products have more or less disappeared from the most popular high street shops—as we illustrated above. For example, we observed this year that a lot of trade in grades 7 and 8 products takes place online through platforms like Vinted¹³ and Marktplaats (see Figures 55a+b). Even more worryingly, another fieldworker highlighted how certain digital marketplaces are being designed and promoted specifically for the purpose of selling blackface products¹⁴. More informal economies such as “real” Zwarte Pieten for private parties are also being increasingly promoted in more personal and domestic spheres, such as WhatsApp and Facebook communities, although perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised that Meta allows this.



From left to right: Figure 42. Grade 7 chocolate Piet figurines in a lunchroom in Den Bosch. Figure 43. Grade 7 chocolate Piet figurine at a bakery in Arnhem. Figure 44. Grade 7 Piet chocolates at a bakery in Utrecht.



Figures 45a and b. Grade 7 and grade 8 products attempting to be sold via Vinted (2024).

Popularity of the festival

It is worth emphasizing that even after the intensified activism and criticism of the Sinterklaas festival, especially since 2011, it remains an incredibly popular and institutionalized cultural event in the Netherlands—dominating Dutch society in November and early December each year. Moreover, the international judgemental reactions on the Piet character have not entirely eradicated “his” role (even as it is greatly diminished as we discuss more below), nor put a sizeable

¹³ Our fieldworker noted that once she reported racist products via Vinted they were removed swiftly by the platform.

¹⁴ Here we refer to the “Nederland Feest” website, which has a special web-section just for Zwarte Piet books, and the “Zwarte Pietje” webshop where blackface costumes and decorations can be purchased.

portion of the population off depicting the caricature in its most racist forms. For instance, the arrival parade is celebrated in November throughout the country not just in a national, televised event, but also in larger and smaller street parties (the so-called “intochten”) throughout the whole country and almost always include some form of Piet to accompany the Sint. The festival is being celebrated not only in stores and on the streets, but also in schools (like in Den Haag [see Figure 46] and Harderwijk [see Figure 47]), daycare centres, offices and even in hospitals! In Den Haag, one of our fieldworkers encountered a parade of Pieten, supposedly with only “soot” marks, but basically covering the entire face and also with an afro wig, learning more towards blackface (i.e., grade 8; see Figure 48).



L: Figure 46. Grade 7 decorations at a primary school in Den Haag. R: Figure 47. Grade 3 invitation for a Sinterklaas event at a primary school in Harderwijk.



Figure 48. A Grade 8 Piet at Den Haag Medical Centre with soot-covered face and afro wig.

The poetry and arts and crafts elements of the festival lend themselves well to stationary and/or bookstores, who offer elaborate window and in-store displays during the season, often targeted at children. Specific books with significant cultural impact, for instance Charlotte Dematons' Sinterklaas feature prominently with its new book cover. What we picked up on in 2024 is that Dematons' book cover (originally grade 7) has been revised to be grade 4 (Stoffelsen, 2023; see also comparison in Figures 49a and 49b), arguably reflecting the increasing DEIB sensibilities of more recent years.



L: Figure 49a. Grade 7 'Sinterklaas' book (2007). R: Figure 49b. Grade 4 'Sinterklaas' book (2023).

Furthermore, there are special “Sinterklaashuizen” (Sinterklaas houses) like the one seen in Holten in 2023, and in Eindhoven in 2024, where people have to buy tickets to enter and “visit” Sinterklaas (see Figure 50). As with (Zwarte) Piets, it is possible to hire actors to play Sinterklaas at private parties and events as well.



Figure 50. Entrance to the Sinterklaashuis in Eindhoven.

Voices from the Field

There is a certain ambiguity around the festival in Dutch society, reflected in our data and observations. Though by no means gone, the most egregious parts (blackface Piets) of Sinterklaas seem indeed to slowly disappear in stores and on the streets, as our data trends show. While the Sinterklaas celebration itself remains an essential period in the calendar for many families, organisations and businesses, our quantitative and qualitative data reveals that it has become more common for Piet to either be portrayed somewhat differently or even not at all. For this year’s report, we asked our team of fieldworkers about their general observations on the festival not only for this year, but also over the span of the study so that they can shed light on these trends. One fieldworker responded about the importance of the festival itself:

“It still is important—the Sint letters were sold out two days before [Sinterklaas] in my local HEMA! But Piets in the old format have disappeared in central Amsterdam”.

The increasingly important role of Christmas is noted, too:

“The decorations are moving more and more to Christmas. Many shops had Santa Clause in their windows”.

Meanwhile, the developments around the discourse of the Piet character and Sinterklaas-related imagery in broader Dutch society are clear:

“Far fewer Piet images in general now than in the first years. I also notice Dutch people I know talking about it a little differently”.

“I have noticed a decline in the unfiltered representation of the traditional Piet costume. This shift is mostly apparent in larger businesses. Smaller, independent businesses are slower to adapt”.

"I still see kids dressed as Piets and some Piets in town for the 'intoct' day, but no longer in blackface, and many fewer than I saw some years ago. I think the [COVID-19] pandemic has also contributed to the change. After two years with no big celebrations, things are much more low key. In general, packaging now seems to use symbols of Sinterklaas, e.g., the bishop's hat, more than images of people".

"A general impression of Sinterklaas merchandise is that businesses seem less reliant on a representation of a Piet figure to present their product".

One fieldworker commented on the somewhat conservative representation of the Sinterklaas figure itself:

"The majority of merchandise in chain stores felt like they erred on the safe side. This includes not [...] seeing any female presenting Sints".

When asked about their hopes for the future in terms of how Sinterklaas can be marketed and celebrated, people were hopeful, but realistic. Some noted how they loved the festival itself, but all hoped to see a continuing de-racialisation of both the Piet and Sinterklaas characters, resulting in a festival that can be enjoyed with everyone. In the words of one of our fieldworkers, Sinterklaas would:

"[...] keep evolving towards a celebration more of social cohesion, with your family and chosen family".

In this scenario, "Piet" would then no longer be necessary to market Sinterklaas merchandise. At the same time, some fieldworkers were more cautious and did think that especially certain smaller, niche businesses (such as bakeries) would continue to cling to the traditional grade 7 Piet for as long as possible. We have shown above through our data analysis that there is a blackface marketplace emerging in the gaps left by the likes of Albert Heijn, Jumbo, HEMA and Jamin. Only time will tell if these major high street stores will have an overriding influence on consumption habits and norms.

Blackface in Spain: The visible manifestation of a denied racism

Georgina Marcelino

Although blackface is not exclusive to Spain, it is interesting how Spanish groups and institutions actively insist on defending it, instead of taking official measures to ban it in defence of civil rights and respect for Black people. The blackface of the Christmas holidays is one of the ways in which in Spanish white power is still hierarchized and the idea of racial superiority is imposed. Structural racism is also this.

We already recognize blackface, and we know how this practice violates the dignity of Black people, it is an insensitive and explicitly violent practice. Blackface ridicules Black people, trivializes our experiences and reinforces racial hierarchy. Let us remember that mockery, jokes and theatricality based on negative stereotypes can serve as tools of population control. Ridicule and caricature have long functioned as weapons, and have been weapons of racial oppression not only in the United States, but also in Europe for a long time.

In Spain, this practice has had a historical presence, especially in popular festivities, the entertainment world, and especially during the Christmas holidays. Shows of white people imitating Black people were born after slavery was abolished as a form of degrading humour, based on imitating Black people and representing them as unevolved, lazy and unintelligent beings. In this short essay "Blackface in Spain: The visible manifestation of a denied racism", I raise a conversation about the practice of blackface in Christmas celebrations in Spain, particularly in the representations of the Three Wise Men, where King Balthazar is traditionally played by white people in blackface. Despite the fact that blackface is widely recognized as a form of racial violence, many people in Spain continue defending these representations as a cultural tradition, highlighting the resistance to abandoning entrenched racist practices in society.

Christmas in Spain, a racist Christmas

The Three Wise Men are the traditional characters of the Spanish Christmas and by inheritance in a big part of Latin America; they are the ones who bring gifts to children every Christmas and are represented with diverse racial origins. The racial issue of the Three Wise Men is based on the ethnic representations of Melchior, Gaspar and Balthazar, three wise men who, according to Christian tradition, visited Baby Jesus in Bethlehem. Generally, Melchior is depicted as an elderly white man, Gaspar as a young man of lighter skin tone and Balthazar as a mature Black man. The latter, in particular, has been visually represented based on racial stereotypes, perpetuating Eurocentric racial clichés, including blackface.

In the processions of "Día de Reyes" in Spain, traditionally King Balthazar and his Court have been white people painted black with black shoe polish, while speaking with a stereotypically ridiculed "African accent" that has been promoted in the media. Although this practice has dissipated in the official parades known as "Cabalgatas" in big cities like Madrid and Barcelona, it is still happening in some towns and cities: as an example, the parade of Seville (2017), the parade of Igualada (2023) and the one of the "Pajes de Alcoi" in Alicante—still to this day.

In Alcoi, in Alicante, there is an immense case of blackface. The so-called "Pajes de Alcoi" are in charge of giving children their gifts and are represented by dozens of white people with black face paint and bright red lips, clearly caricaturing Black people. This celebration has become a candidate for intangible heritage before UNESCO in 2017, which, of course, raised quite a lot of controversy, but not enough to eradicate it.

Black Spanish resistance to blackface

These traditions, thought of as entertainment for children, end up hiding, without much effort, racist representations. Year after year Black activists and anti-racist movements open the debate, condemning its practice and demanding its cessation, and year after year the denunciations end up confronting sectors of Spanish society that defend it as cultural tradition. These so-called "traditions" serve as a pretext to perpetuate the idea of racial superiority of whiteness.

Black people living in Spain expressed their disagreement and condemned the violence of these practices on many occasions. Some of the launched initiatives were: the collection of signatures promoted by the online Afrofeminas Magazine in 2017, a community dedicated to making people of African descent more visible; the denunciations in 2018 of the first Black deputy of Spain Rita Bosaho, the first Black woman member of the Spanish Congress; and denunciations of Afrocolectiva, which defines itself as an Afro-feminist, anti-racist and pan-Africanist online community, who have highlighted the issue on their social media profiles. Moreover, Spain has a fantastic and powerful dramaturgical work: "Blackface y otras vergüenzas", by the director and activist Silvia Albert Sopale—an Afro-Spanish actress and theater director. Another important example is the special episode launched in La Güira, the podcast of which I am co-creator and producer, and which also happens to be the first Afro-feminist, anti-racist and Afro-Caribbean podcast produced in Spain. In the episode "Blackface, así lo vemos", we talk about the practice of blackface in a didactic way and from our experiences generating an educational content about the situation.

Looking to the future

Meanwhile, many Spanish folks continue to defend this practice by calling it "tradition", "culture" and even "magical representation". One of the most recurrent excuses is to say that it is a way to keep the magic of Christmas for children—something extremely ridiculous, since it is children who first differentiate a real Black person from a painted white person. I was present at the 2023 Cabalgata de Reyes in Málaga and it was a relief to see a Black actor instead of a white person with black face paint. It was about time. I knew that what I was witnessing with my own eyes was the work of the Afrofeminist groups in Málaga. That "magician" king who was a "real" Black man was the successful result of the Black voices that had risen up to achieve it. For Christmas 2024, once again several fellow activists and anti-racist collectives put the issue on the table, and some of us declared to be sincerely exhausted. There will always be voices denouncing racism in the Spanish state, but this comes with exhaustion and weariness. I think we are all aware that it is a long-distance race, but we, the mainly Black community in Spain, also recognize that we are not willing to denounce the same thing all our lives. Spain has no need to turn to this racist practice since Black people who live in this territory have the capacity to self-represent ourselves. We are here.

We appeal to educational bodies as well as collective public action, but as long as anti-racist public policies are not implemented, we will continue to face hard and permanent work. We continue fighting from this trench.

"THERE IS NO RACISM



, JUST EXCITEMENT"

"MY EYES GET MOIST

WHEN
I SEE
THEM



PASS
UNDER
MY
HOUSE.

,AND THE WORSHIP IS
unique"

"I LOVE THIS
TRADITION AND IT
DOESN'T HURT

anybody"



CULTURE

AVERSION TO
POLITICAL
CORRECTNESS".



"HISTORY,"

TRADITION



"IT IS THE OLDEST
AND

most beautiful

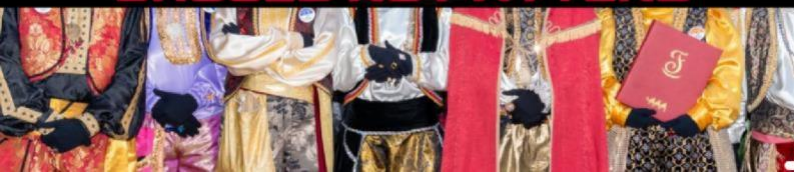
CELEBRATION IN ALL
OF SPAIN."



"THOSE WHO ARE BOTHERED



SHOULD NOT ATTEND"



THERE IS NO

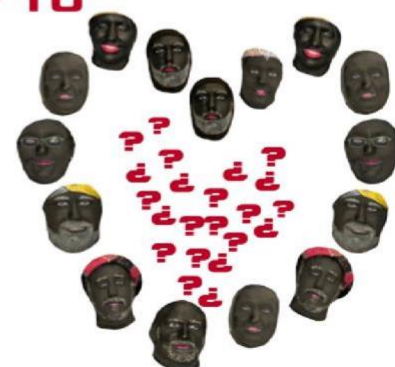
discrimination of any kind

IN FACT WE ALL FIGHT TO BE
ABLE TO PARTICIPATE



IN OUR
BEST
PARTY"

"THE COLOR BLACK
HAS ALWAYS BEEN
USED BECAUSE IT IS
THE BEST WAY TO
AVOID BEING
recognised"



The Right to Fantasize

Arletta Pérez Hernández

Spain, like many European nations, often avoids confronting its role in the transatlantic slave trade. Discussions of slavery are rare in public discourse, as though it were a distant, isolated chapter of history. Today, many white Europeans feel racism has been overcome, yet the structural privilege they retain allows practices like blackface to continue unchecked. The concept of race was imposed by colonizers; its victims continue to suffer under a system shaped for others' benefit. Therefore, those who profit from these power dynamics resist change. Choosing tradition over the dignity of the Black community is inherently violent. It turns our identity into a caricature and invalidates our discomfort.

Blackface performances perpetuate stereotypes, reducing Black features to entertainment. This portrayal reinforces the notion of Blackness as "other", framing it as exotic or supplemental to whiteness. When Black identity is treated as a costume, it signals exclusion. Unsurprisingly, rarely Black individuals are involved in these events. For Black viewers, this performance is more than unsettling—it is a rupture (Griffith, 2020). There is an eerie tension in witnessing this: the celebratory atmosphere of the performers stands in stark contrast to the discomfort it provokes. That contradiction is central to the disturbance. The cheerfulness, the festive context, makes the violence feel even more surreal.

Efforts to educate about blackface are often met with defensiveness, leading to a burden placed on the Black community to explain from a position of marginalization. As a result, Black activists are labelled divisive for challenging a "joyful" tradition, while defenders of blackface are painted as harmless traditionalists. These would fiercely attempt to elude racist allegations, but would reject engaging in any anti-racist gesture, such as a reform of their tradition.

Spain: Blackface in Numbers

The Three Wise Men parade of Alcoy is Spain's oldest, held since 1885, with historical origins tracing back to 1866 (Alcoi, n.d.; Bódalo Munuera, 2025). In Catalunya, the tradition was adopted and adapted in places like Igualada (Reis d'Igualada, 2025)—the region's oldest—and San Vicente del Horts. Across Spain, it is common for Baltasar (the Black King) to be portrayed by a white person in blackface. As a result, blackface is a widespread practice in Spanish parades on the night of January 5th. For the first time, in 2016, the chosen person to be Baltasar in Madrid's parade was a Black man (Vilares, 2015). Nonetheless, it hasn't been a permanent decision in the city. This parade is celebrated in different cities across Spain where blackface is the rule. In the case of the big cities, the social pressure is greater and their final decision about Baltasar is often publicly questioned. Therefore, Black people are most often chosen for the role of Baltasar in more urban settings.

The prominence of Alcoy and Igualada parades stems from the numerous presence of "pajes" (pageboys) or "negrets" (meaning "little Black men"), the Three Wise Men's helpers. Tradition holds that the kings bring gifts to children, with their assistants helping carry and distribute them. In recent years, estimates suggest that around 800 people performed in blackface during Igualada's parade, with organizers claiming a need for about 1,000 (La Vanguardia, 2014; Perreau, 2023). In 2025, Alcoy featured 400 "pajes" (Agulló, 2025); its parade garners more attention due to both its age and controversy. While it's difficult to gauge the exact number of blackface participants across other countries, Spain hosts one of the largest such events in Europe. While criticism has gradually grown, compared to the Dutch case of Zwarte Piet, the public protests have yet to make a significant impact on this practice.

Resistance and public opinion

In 2001, Alcoy's parade was declared a celebration of national tourist interest. A decade later, the regional government recognized it as a cultural heritage event. For years, this parade has drawn attention from the public. Nonetheless, in 2018, the ongoing debate gained more prevalence. In this period, Agustín Almodóbar, a senator from Spain's Popular Party, proposed it for UNESCO World Heritage status, a proposal unanimously backed and passed in the Senate (Europa Press Nacional, 2018).

Anti-racist groups reacted with strong opposition. Afroféminas, a Black feminist and anti-racist collective, has long condemned the tradition (Afroféminas, n.d.; SOS Racismo, 2017). When the UNESCO proposal was made, they publicly denounced the parade as dehumanizing, since it reinforces negative stereotypes and falsifies the image of Blackness (dya Malaka, 2018). They called for historical reflection to expose the racist origins of these traditions and their damaging effects on racially minoritized communities in Spain (Afroféminas, 2019). Rita Bosaho, activist and parliamentarian from Alicante, commented on Afroféminas' post on X (formerly Twitter): "Discrimination and institutional racism cannot be confused with cultural actions. Alcoy City Council, be aware... this is racism" (Sánchez, 2017). Her own party, Podemos, distanced itself from her stance and issued an apology, suggesting she needed more education on the issue (Vilaplana, 2017).

Historian Antumi Toasijé highlighted the problematic origins of the parade. He detailed Alcoy's past as a slave colony, noting how 19th century newspapers described the pageboys as "slaves" (Toasijé, 2017). Like other scholars, he condemns blackface as offensive and outdated: "To continue with this mockery is to trample on the dignity of people of African descent and the historical memory of all humanity". In 2017, a petition on Change.org (Espinosa Lloret, 2018) advocating for UNESCO recognition gathered 11,760 signatures and was marked "victorious". Most of the comments came from Alcoy residents and praised the parade. However, UNESCO has not officially responded. Following previous steps in 2025, Afroféminas relaunched their petition, urging an end to blackface in Alcoy's parade.

The racist fantasy

Blackface as a performance is such a disproportionate act when one considers the effort put in and the result obtained, culminating in a ridiculous show that creates a painful discomfort for such a significant part of the local and global community. For Black viewers, the performance of blackface is not just damaging but incomprehensible, and this experience lacks coherence not only as a performance itself, but also as a hobby evoking joy as people pursue it with enthusiasm. From the different options they may have available to cultivate arts, such as make-up, costume design and decoration, they actively choose the destructive format of blackface. Even during Christmas, which offers a myriad of scenes, characters, settings and opportunities for performances, in which masquerades could instead be rather more aesthetically pleasant. However, the present visual composition "Fantasy" aims to emphasize the disorientation that is experienced as a critical observer; it's an acute and exaggerated attempt to expose the lack of coherence in this practice.

The emotional reactions evoked by blackface images are immediate and complex: disgust, confusion, disbelief and a deep sense of unease. There is an eerie tension in witnessing this: the celebratory atmosphere of the performers stands in stark contrast to the discomfort it provokes (Griffith, 2020). That contradiction is central to the disturbance. The cheerfulness and the festive context makes the violence feel even more surreal. The word "fantasy", which gives title to my visual composition, refers to the dynamic between the white and Black imagery. Black people are not a part of the celebration, but a vehicle to experience fantasy. The statements rejecting the anti-blackface criticism come from a place of frustration, since Black people's right to dignity interferes with their self-attributed right to fantasize (Habel, 2018; Wekker, 2016). Consequently, in this fantasy, historical and social reality has no place for them; the detachment is what makes it special and genuine for them. Once real bodies object to their practice, the fantasy element risks being extinguished. Thus, these image-text juxtapositions expose this dynamic white people engage with in the presence of judgement.

Textual elements in this work are intentionally arranged to underscore the uncanniness of these portrayals. Presenting public comments alongside the imagery is a way to interrogate the legitimacy often granted to tradition. It's an attempt to strip away the credibility through a direct exposure that results effortlessly in ridiculousness. The comments selected come originally from a public petition page in which fierce citizens asked for protection of the tradition (Espinosa Lloret, 2018). Among a variety of public statements about blackface in Spain, these are characterised by a casual and light tone, coming across to the reader as effortlessly sarcastic. Even if posted with innocence, they perfectly evidence the massive disinterest from white people in real-life phenomena, such as the construction of race. Cruelty is tangible in their strong endeavour to keep defending a "party" within their rules, removing the "obstructing" Black view on it, since it was never meant for us to either enjoy, for us to join in. The recurrence of this event is a strong statement in favour of the fantasy of the oppressor. "I am unbothered. I am unaffected. I laugh under a mask that I created myself. The distance is pleasurable. I will have fun. As I can, I will, I must!"

Exposing faces, zooming in, portraying them as we see them (not as they see themselves) is all key to confronting blackface. When viewed closely, the details resist dismissal. The tradition reveals itself not as innocent, but as haunting. This raw portrayal interrogates their main characters, asking them (with doubt) whether their statements correspond with the result of their actions. Appropriating our own image interferes with their privilege to fantasize. The battle is already challenging, as their justifications reside in the final product of the festivity: joy. Unfortunately, until the day race does not dictate our existence, using blackface will be a reminder of white people's ability to live out their fantasies, at the expense of Black lives and dreams.

Conclusions

At this stage, after everything that has been said in the past 15 years on this matter in the Netherlands, anyone selling, using, making or displaying a Zwarte Piet item (outside of educational purposes¹⁵) inherently supports violence against Black people. Pro-Zwarte Pieters also, for the most part, seem to refuse to accept the inevitable. Thankfully, as our research has shown, certain businesses (like Jamin, Ekoplaza, Tony's Chocolonely and Bolletje) and local authorities do seem to be consistently future-oriented enough to invest in meaningfully revising how they market and celebrate Sinterklaas—of course to cynically avoid criticism that might lead to market failures, but arguably the end result of increased societal inclusion remains the same. The market and consumer changes we have traced across 10 reports did not happen by chance; they were brought forth by the courageous work of innumerable Black-led campaigns: Afrispectives; Ancestors UnKnown; Bij1; Black Archives; Black Heritage Tours; BSE Conference; Dipsaus; Museum of Black Futures; Nederland Wordt Beter; Ocan; Omroep Zwart; Roet in het Eten; Samen Tegen Racisme and Week Tegen Racisme; University of Colour; Zwart Manifest; Zwarte Piet is Racisme—the list is inexhaustible. While KOZP steps away from the ongoing blackface discussion from this year, they will not leave a void behind them. The protests, artworks and scholarship of all aforementioned social justice interventions have ensured that the changes we have witnessed around Sinterklaas are (and will continue to be) irreversible and rooted in cultural evolutions, regardless of whatever resistance to our presence and liberation we continue to face.

It took two years for the UN to urge the Netherlands to properly engage with its Black population regarding the issue of blackface being used in the country's most popular festival. It took 10 years for the government and monarchy to acknowledge not only that the largest party Dutch culture has to offer rests on the debasement of Black people, but also to officially concede to the link to the (legacy of the) Dutch enslavement of hundreds of thousands of Africans. The Netherlands is proud of its wealth and standing in the world, crediting that to an industrious and adventurous maritime history, rather than colonialism, theft, exploitation and subjugation. This is not conceptual anthropology or ancient history—it is very much present-day and real world. Racial discrimination in Dutch schools and workplaces, where Black minds and abilities are subjected to closer scrutiny, reveals how enduring and guiding the Zwarte Piet figure has been as a stereotype of Black people, plucked from the same racist tropes that once justified life-long Black servitude. The post-2020 apologies of Mark Rutte¹⁶ and King Willem-Alexander followed by immediate silence illustrates their performative remorse, as well as indicating that the topic should now be closed and we should all just move on and get over it.

The average consumer wants the anti-Zwarte Piet campaigners to just move on and get over it, too. They find it frustrating that we continue to call out instances of blackface when we see them; they never consider that we are also fatigued. "We have been having the same conversation every winter since the 1920s, perhaps earlier, and you still don't get it?" is what we would say if we could. However, we do not have time to point out the obvious; there is still so much work to be done. Our research has shown that Zwarte Piet is almost entirely diminished from certain Dutch high street shops and supermarkets, but it is not truly socially effective if people continue to ridicule Blackness elsewhere. Thus, there is seemingly no political will to proactively handle these instances of blatant racism without campaigners and concerned residents first urging them to do so, yet we need local authority and national government guidance and perhaps even interventions when it comes to the use of public spaces and local neighbourhoods¹⁷.

How can Black people unconditionally feel at home in any given country when they are mocked ritualistically each year, especially when that mocking leads to further racism, harassment and socio-cultural exclusion? We maintain that keeping Black populations in "their place" is—at least in part—precisely the point when one considers the bizarre dedication required to defend the grotesque act of blackface. Maintaining racist figures and tropes like Zwarte Piet in societies like the Netherlands, Switzerland and Spain enables white populations to feel rooted, centred and endlessly superior. Meanwhile, those who become minoritized by this form of socio-racial stratification can never actually belong unquestionably—Black people become stuck trying to overprove the right to belong. We are expected to appease dominant populations by going along with racist "jokes", apparently consenting to our own humiliation by a form of humour we are not permitted to co-create. Sustaining this social (and institutional) upper hand explains to some degree why everyday people fight so hard, so violently to hold on to Zwarte Piet and other monuments of race-based colonial legacies. Arguably, it is not about the character itself, but what it represents for the entire structure of society.

As illustrated by the examples from Spain and Switzerland, the lack of (alt/right-wing) political will bolstered by arguments to justify blackface are not specific to the Netherlands—this demonstrably is not about Dutch culture. It is in fact about

¹⁵ In contrast, for instance, with the work of David Pilgrim (2015) and his *Jim Crow Museum*, which makes use of anti-Black memorabilia with the purpose of educating visitors about the US' tortured racial history.

¹⁶ Rutte, who has a strong history of indignantly dismissing the racism of Zwarte Piet and insisting on the full assimilation of racialized minorities, especially appeared to reluctantly bend to the international gaze post-2020 in his lacklustre, non-committal acceptance that Sinterklaas needed to become more inclusive by removing blackface.

¹⁷ In this instance, public spaces being used for performances that are inherently racist and in and of themselves encouraging racial harassment and abuse, which would ordinarily be considered a crime.

how white dominance and exclusion along racial lines works, as well as how it continues to be rooted in an often-denied colonial hangover. Blackface performances operate in a manner that proclaims: You cannot be part of this society because you are the “Other”. This gatekeeping of belonging prevents racially minoritized individuals from meaningfully rebuilding certain cultural practices, because structurally as well as socially we are not actually considered to be part of the fabric of society. The synergy between the anti-racist campaigns described in Spain and Switzerland with that of the Netherlands is palpable, and when looking into our quantitative and qualitative results, especially the diminishment of grade 8 data, one can witness in real time the disruptive power of social justice work on consumer markets.

All the same, it has been challenging to concretely assess whether stores are responding to anti-blackface protesters merely for commercial reasons (i.e., not wanting to appear racist and subsequently lose business, especially from international markets), or that the shifts are evidence of a genuine, if slow, cultural shift. We also see from the qualitative research results and international contributions in this year’s report that resistance from white supremacists remains strong. While the Netherlands might not be unique in treasuring and defending this pernicious form of racism, it is quite different in the extent to which historically Zwarte Piet has helped to drive the Sinterklaas economy. Without serious, long-term investment in Dutch anti-racist efforts, the niche, blackface marketplaces that have emerged in recent years will continue to flourish in direct competition to the mainstream iteration and imagery of the festival. Plenty of consumers and revellers who do not yet necessarily understand why Zwarte Piet was such an issue in the first place could turn away from grades 3 and 5 Piets in favour of grades 7 and 8, and we have little reason to believe that brands like HEMA and Xenos will not follow suit.

When corporate DEIB is practiced that is untethered to concrete contextual references and commitments to how diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging manifest throughout society, the result is surface level gestures. Simply giving Zwarte Piet soot marks can never properly nor transformatively reconcile with the Dutch afterlives of enslavement and colonialism legacies properly. This shift is rooted in the same colonial amnesia that produced the soot lie many years ago, part of the devious excuse to keep this racist performance intact for decades. Soot marks do not speak to the reasons why Zwarte Piet was unacceptable and harmful. Finally, this kind of corporate superficiality also means these businesses can revert back to harmful stereotypes whenever they deem them more profitable. In fact, in a current Dutch political and cultural context that is more right-wing and anti-DEIB, our results from HEMA in the 2024 research cycle (the brand that previously led the way in re-telling the Sinterklaas story) show how their interpretation of a sooty Piet increasingly resembles Zwarte Piet imagery from 15 years ago. Xenos’ “sneaky”, faceless Piet who hides behind musical instruments and colourful gifts is hardly a better solution; it may only seem playful but it allows Xenos to get away with not committing either way for or against blackface in their branding. Consumers can imagine what they want, and therefore the gateway to racist fantasy is kept wide open. But it’s deeper than just that: the anonymity the faceless Piet affords, added to the fact that all Piets have the same name and (historically) are first and foremost defined racially as “Zwarte”, echoes how European enslavement of Africans involved forcing onto individuals “Christian” names, forcing them into lifelong servitude, became property and stripped human beings of their families, their cultures, their dreams. These faceless Piets remind us of how this brutal stripping of identity, agency and humanity served to drive an entire economy for centuries, and brands like Xenos are insulting our intelligence if they think we will just accept this. We deserve so much more than blackface, soot and hidden agendas, and for this reason we know the campaign against racism and blackface will go on—and ERIF will be there to chronicle every precious victory.

Odi Odi Fa Yu

James Yuca

Gran yorka, odi odi na yu¹⁸
waka bun bun, waka bun bun
Langa ten mi no si mi kondreman
Pasi langa ten

Kondreman, odi odi fa yu
Kondreman, odi odi fa yu
Waka bun bun, waka bun bun
Langa ten mi no si mi kondreman
Pasi langa ten

Langa ten mi no si mi kondreman
Pasi langa ten
Oh langa ten mi no si mi kondreman
Pasi langa ten

I am Yuca, the root and the starch. I have a complaint, I know it is our ancestral tradition to gather and sing but I don't speak the language.

In the whiteness I need to figure out a way to relate to the whiteness. The whiteness we are in, gallery 3, a neutral canvas without any links whatsoever to the concept of white supremacy¹⁹, the same way Zwarte Piet has nothing to do with colonialism.

It is not that the subject of my artistic practice is colonialism, it is that nearly every single person whose opinion I hold dear has been subjected to colonialism.

Gran yorka, odi odi na yu
waka bun bun, waka bun bun
Langa ten mi no si mi kondreman
Pasi langa ten

In *Des Fest das Huhns*, a 1992 Austrian mockumentary from the perspective of a fictional African film crew, you see images of native Austrians dancing, the narrator explains that while African culture specializes in dance and song, Europeans are said to be more of a culture of the written word.

This part of the documentary touches upon something essential about the European way of seeing and describing others. The superiority is implied, a neutral "reality" based on "civility". After all, we are asked to not disrespect the awkward shuffling of white bodies in circles. It's not their fault, it's not their culture.

Kondreman, odi odi fa yu
Kondreman, odi odi fa yu

My invited guests, my countrymen, my countrywomen, my countrythems, what do we do in this white space? A space described as neutral while it is as artificial as the concept of white supremacy itself? How much of myself and my ancestors will I lay bare for assessment by an institution?

How much access to my racialized body do I grant the Royal Academy in order to secure a profession?

The things I have made I will put up for display the way the "West" is used to, the same way ritual objects for Winti belonging to my ancestors are in "Het Tropenmuseum". I don't need to tell you how they got there, my countrythems.

I don't speak the language my parents do, I called in help from my friend, Chévany Kartodimedjo, who owns a Surinamese dictionary to make sure I can pass on my complaint to our ancestors.

¹⁸ This refrain is borrowed from the Charl Landvreugd 2014 work: "movt nr 7: On Cairo / Performance (1)", which in turn refers to the 1969 poem "After Temekoe" by Edgar Cairo.

¹⁹ Abigail Cain (2017) discusses how white supremacy in the art sector is manifested in and by the "white cube".

Als Tweede Generatie Immigrant spreek ik Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands. Beschaafd zodat mijn kleurtje minder opvalt, beschaafd zodat ik beter pas in de neutraliteit.

For any relationship to grow I have to give as well as receive, that's why I have chosen the traditional call and answer format. All of you who consider themselves to be my countrypeople, all of you who consider themselves to be generous of spirit, willing to return something to me that could have been lost in whiteness, please sing with me.

Gran yorka, odi odi na yu
waka bun bun, waka bun bun
Langa ten mi no si mi kondreman
Pasi langa ten

Kondreman, odi odi fa yu
Kondreman, odi odi fa yu
Waka bun bun, waka bun bun
Langa ten mi no si mi kondreman
Pasi langa ten

Langa ten mi no si mi kondreman
Pasi langa ten
Oh langa ten mi no si mi kondreman
Pasi langa ten

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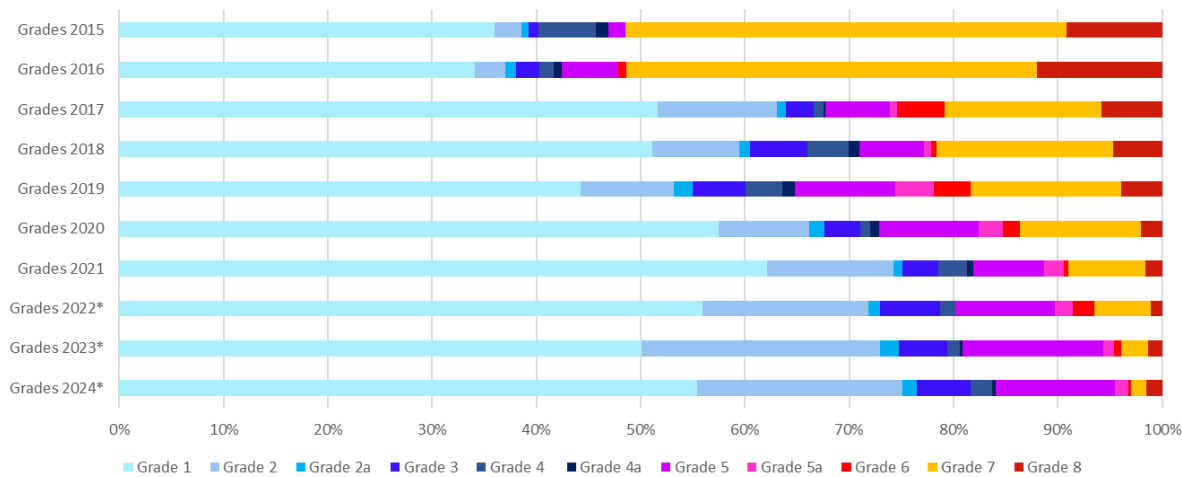
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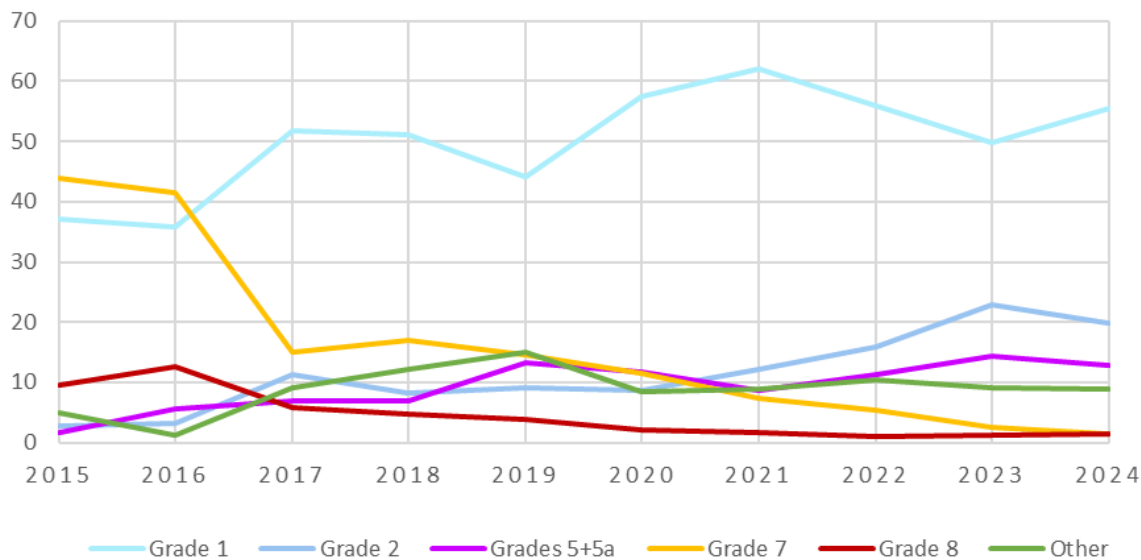
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Appendices

A - Detailed Graphs



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D - Glossary

Chocoladeletter

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.

Golliwog

The golliwog is a doll-like character, created by cartoonist and author Florence Kate Upton in her children's books in the late 19th century. It was reproduced as a children's soft toy and was very popular especially into the 1970s in the southern US, the UK, South Africa and Australia. The golliwog is widely considered a racist caricature of Black people, alongside such characters as "pickaninnies", minstrels and "mammy" figures. The doll is characterized by jet black skin, eyes rimmed in white, exaggerated red lips and frizzy hair, based on the blackface minstrel tradition. The word "golliwog" is also a racial slur towards Black people in the UK and Australia.

Intocht

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

Jute zak

A burlap bag, which traditionally contains the gifts and sweets Sinterklaas hands out to children and which is carried for him by his Piets. Children used to be told that if they had misbehaved, the Piets would take them back to Spain (Sinterklaas headquarters) with them in the same burlap bag. This last part of the story has gone out of favour recently however, since it is thought not to be educationally correct to threaten children with abduction.

Keti Koti

This is the name of the annual commemoration of the formal end of slavery in the Kingdom of The Netherlands, on the 1 July 1863, in the former colonies of Surinam and the Caribbean islands of Curaçao, Aruba, Bonaire, Saint Martin, Saba and Saint Eustasius (or Statia). Originally it is a Surinamese day of commemoration. The name is from Sranantongo and means "broken chains".

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 the racist figure of Zwarte Piet. The group has announced they will cease to exist as of 2025 as they believe they have done their part in the struggle.

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 (see under jute zak or burlap bag) from which he hands them out to children and/or throws them into the crowd.

Nederland Wordt Beter

A Dutch foundation (founded 2011) focused on education and awareness about the influence of colonialism and slavery on current Dutch society, to create a future without racism and exclusion. Before 2025 the foundation aims to have structural education on the colonial and slavery past, a Sinterklaas festival without racist stereotypes and a national slavery commemoration.

Pakjesavond

An evening of celebrations held on or around St. Nicholas Day on December 5, celebrated with family and/or friends. During the evening, gifts are exchanged along with personalized poems and "surprises": fun and dedicated wrappings around the gift, often reflective of the receiver's hobby, interest or passion.

Pepernoten

A type of cookie, small, brown and pellet shaped, prepared with aniseed or 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. They are very similar to kruidnoten.

Randstad

A term formally denoting a "half ring" of bigger cities and urbanized municipalities that runs from Utrecht and Amersfoort via Amsterdam and Den Haag to Rotterdam and Dordrecht. However, increasingly it has come to denote the entire highly urbanized area in the western part of the Netherlands and is sometimes seen as a megacity.

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 many Dutch municipalities, 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 (present-day Turkey). For unknown reasons—but most likely due to Dutch history in which the Spanish played an important part—in the storytelling around the festival he lives in Spain year-round with his Piets. Sinterklaas is the main protagonist of the 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 mitre and cloak, riding a white horse. In this report, Sinterklaas refers to both the character and the festival.

Sinterklaasjournaal

The Sinterklaasjournaal is an annual fictional news programme in the context of the Sinterklaas celebration. It is broadcast on Dutch television channel NTR, and depicts the Sinterklaas and (Zwarte) Piet experience. The format of “real” television news is imitated, with storylines presented during each episode as reports, following the arrival and antics of Sinterklaas and his Piets, which means it can be seen as a scripted reality programme. The target audience is primary school age children, who often are shown the programme during school hours. As such, the storylines of the show form the basis of the most dominant and widely-accepted Sinterklaas narrative(s).

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 through Dutch colonialism in the East Indies (Indonesia). Speculaas is traditionally eaten during the festival of Sinterklaas, but can be found in shops year-round.

Speculaaspop

A large gingerbread cookie, baked into the shape of a figure. This gingerbread man is traditionally given at Sinterklaas. In the past, a boy would decorate a gingerbread doll with, for example, icing and nuts. He brought this to a girl to show his affection. If the doll was accepted, the feelings were mutual. In the 19th century, gingerbread men were also popular with a thin gold-colored layer made of copper, tin and zinc. The custom may go back to the function of Saint Nicholas as ‘marriage maker’, in the legend in which he gives three girls their dowry. In the 20th and 21st centuries the speculaaspop is often depicted as Piet.

Taaitaai

A type of soft (or tough = taai) cookie, traditionally eaten during the festival of Sinterklaas. Its taste resembles that of speculaas but includes aniseed. Taaitaai 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. Historically, Zwarte Piet was commonly portrayed as a white person in blackface, with an Afro wig, big red lips and/or gold hoop earrings. While this has predominantly changed in recent years (see roetveegpiet above), this traditional, racist caricature can still be seen today in some parts of the Netherlands.

E - About the Guest Contributors

das james, or Dustin Anthony Schneider James (1995), is an artist and researcher currently based in The Hague. Coming from small town Southern California with roots in Jamaica and Germany, he has spent the last six years tracing home-community-self here in the Netherlands. das has Bachelor's degrees in Ecology, Behavior & Evolution from the University of California San Diego (2018) and Photography from the Royal Academy of Art (2024). His artistic practice strives to link these two frames of study through curiosity, criticality and collage. das is a Capricorn.

Georgina Marcelino is a communications manager, International high education lecturer, and visual artist. She holds a Ph.D. in Communications, and PR, as well as a Master's degree in Strategic Advertising and a Bachelor's degree in Creative Advertising. As a brand communications consultant, she has worked with several global brands. As a visual artist, she has participated in contemporary art festivals in Spain, Mexico, Cuba, United States and Dominican Republic. She currently teaches at Syracuse University, promoting communication studies with an anti-racist and anti-stereotypes approach. As an activist, her work has a special focus in social transformation, equity and representation. She has been part of the team of speakers and press representatives of recognized anti-racist organizations in Spain. Co-creator and producer of the Afro-Caribbean and Afrofeminist podcast; La Güira.

Ashley Melcherts is a Surinamese Dutch sociologist, and currently a PhD candidate at Mississippi State University. She has taught Intro to Sociology and Intro to Race & Ethnicity, and has been a member of the Race and Racism Research Working Group (RRWG) sponsored by African American Studies. Ashley is mostly concerned with how social inequalities at the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender influence people's sense of themselves, how they develop their identity over time, and what that means for navigating everyday life. Ashley is also a former track & field student-athlete and track & field/cross country volunteer assistant coach.

Arletta Pérez Hernández (La Habana, 1999) holds a Master of Science in Psychology of the Online Media from Erasmus University Rotterdam. With experience in Spain, Italy, and Poland, she has worked with migrant and at-risk communities, focusing on diversity, inclusion, and the responsible use of digital technologies. Her research explores anti-migration narratives in European media and the impact of online racism. Combining her interdisciplinary background with a passion for social equity, Arletta now brings her expertise into design, contributing a satirical poster on blackface to challenge racist narratives and strengthen communities across Europe.

James Yuca is a multidisciplinary artist that prioritizes storytelling, by passing on knowledge through the visual and verbal we humans can experience the lives of others, gain a new understanding of time and our role in it, linking consciousnesses through time and space. Storytelling reconciles the material with the immaterial and is a universal art form. Yuca is currently studying at the Royal Academy of Arts, involved in community organizing at The HangOut 070 and loves performing improvised dances for her cat friend Nana.

About ERIF

Founded in 2013, the European Race and Imagery Foundation (ERIF) aims to re-imagine a more inclusive Europe. We expose and criticize dominant narratives of belonging and racist imagery and amplify stories of resistance and liberation. All our activities seek to remedy how mainstream anti-racism neglects the histories, views and creativity of racially minoritized peoples—especially Black people. In this perspective, ERIF produces events (conferences and workshops), social media campaigns (e.g., our Quotes of Resistance campaigns), online content (blog posts and toolkits) and research projects and publications (e.g., the annual Sinterklaas report; a special issue for *Darkmatter* journal about blackface in Europe), with the aim of magnifying, connecting across countries and facilitating the accessibility of anti-racism efforts by activists, scholars, artists and residents.