WHEN BLACK STORIES GO GLOBAL

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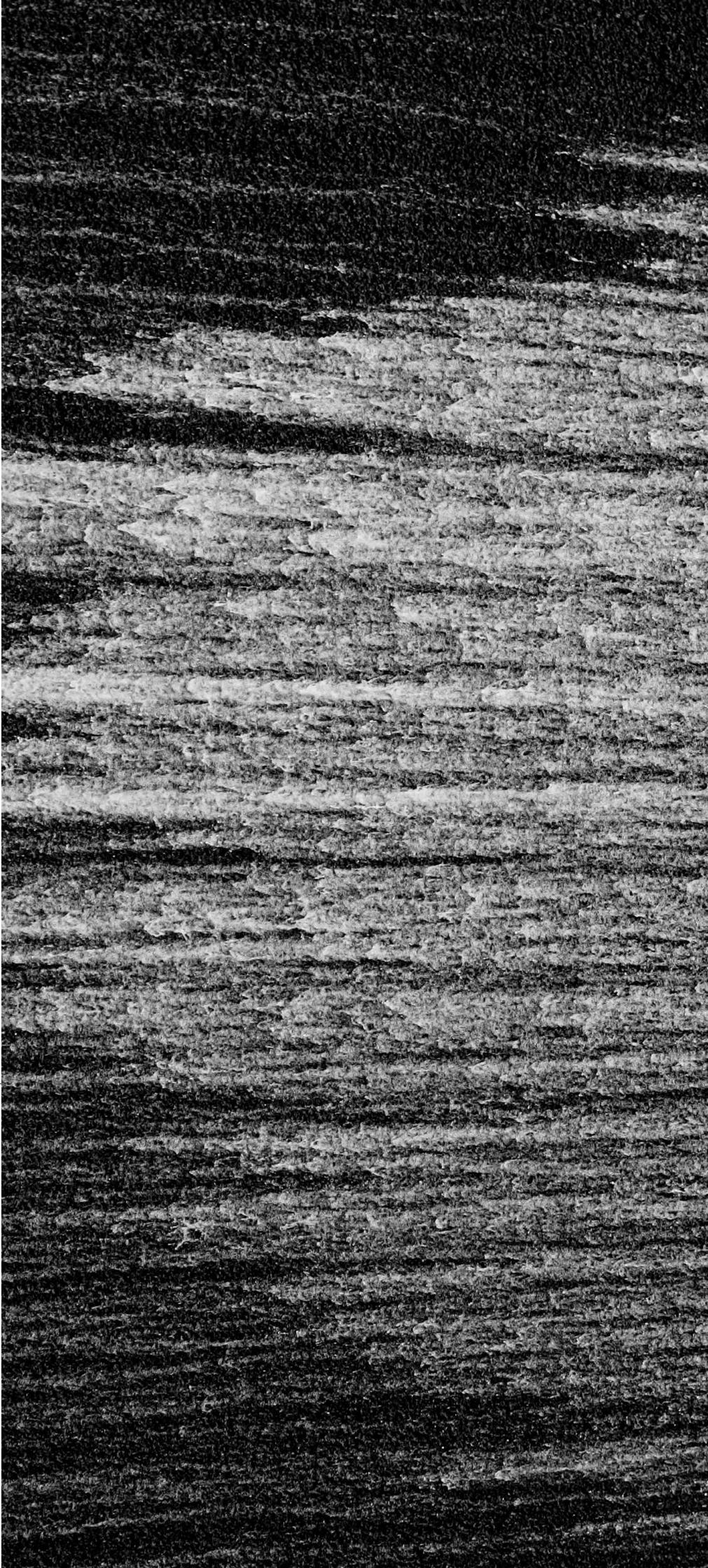
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Translators act as cultural navigators, traversing through forests of connotation and denotation to spread important narratives. Translation has the potential to challenge geographic and linguistic boundaries. However, differing cultural norms and understandings of race and racialized language can make it complicated to disseminate Black stories on a global scale. This project examines the methods used in translating African American Black film and literature. In doing so, the research team considers how translation affects the international understanding of Black bodies and narratives as well as how cultural nuances can impact how racial terms are translated in different countries.

Our project follows the spread of Black stories as they travel globally, interpreting the results through a social-scientific lense that contextualizes the cultural and linguistic impacts of translation within our data. We performed a corpus-based analysis that explores the lexical choices and translation strategies employed by translators in selected works of African-American literature and film, as well as a macro-level analysis of the geographic and linguistic spread of these types of translations.

THERE IS VALUE IN UNDERSTANDING OTHER COUNTRIES' IMAGININGS OF RACE SO THAT WE CAN UNDERSTAND HOW RACE, BOTH HERE AND ABROAD, IS A CONCEPT THAT IS HISTORICALLY-SPECIFIC, CULTURALLY-MANUFACTURED, AND POLITICALLY MODIFIABLE ACCORDING TO WHATEVER FOUNDATIONAL FICTIONS (AND REALITIES) A NATION WISHES TO PRODUCE.

JOHN KEENE, "TRANSLATING POETRY, TRANSLATING BLACKNESS"

ABOUT US

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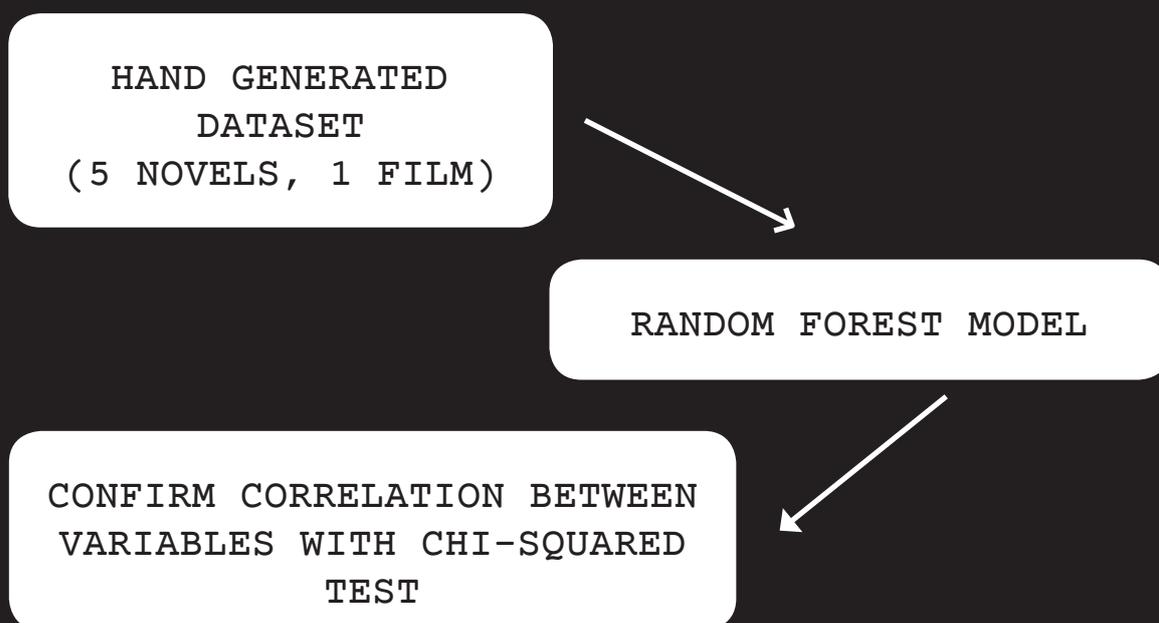

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MIRIAM SHAMS-RAINEY
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PHASE I

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1) How is the culturally-bound language in African-American literature and film rendered for international audiences?

2) How do variables such as TERM TYPE, WORD CLASS, PURPOSE, GENRE, FRAMING, SPEAKER RACE, AUDIENCE RACE, and TRANSLATION COUNTRY interact with the dependent variable TRANSLATION STRATEGY?

3) How are translators approaching specific terms?

4) What are Spanish and Portuguese translation norms?

METHODOLOGY

HAND GENERATED DATASET
(5 NOVELS, 1 FILM)

RANDOM FOREST MODEL

CONFIRM CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIABLES WITH CHI-SQUARED TEST

PHASE II
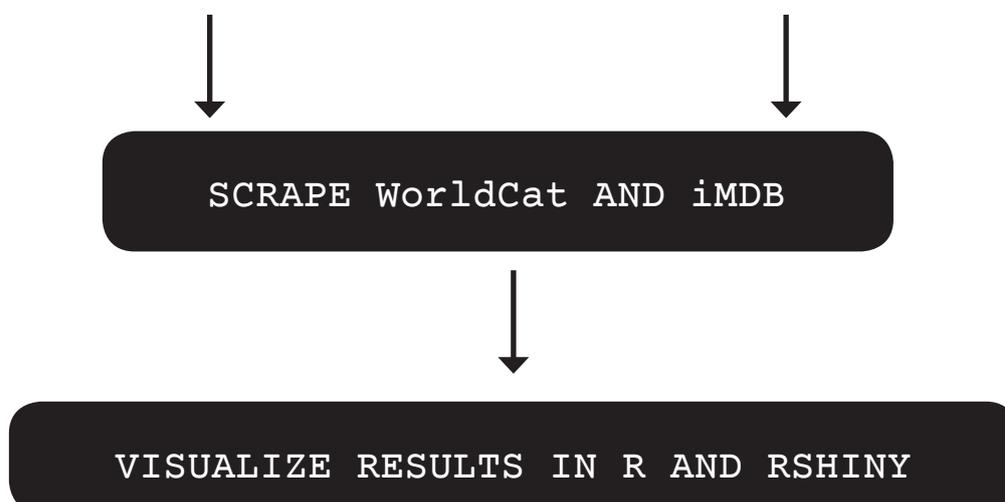
GUIDING QUESTIONS

1) Which parts of the African-American experience are being translated? (Genre)

2) Where are these translations occurring? (Geographical Spread)

3) When are these translations occurring? (Temporal Spread)

4) In what languages are these translations occurring? (Linguistic Spread)

METHODOLOGY

SCRAPE WorldCat AND iMDB

VISUALIZE RESULTS IN R AND RSHINY

Pruned Tree Model By Translation Strat

official equivalent
0.64

Term Type IS an Ethnoracial Label

Term Type is NOT an Ethnoracial

official equivalent
0.75

intervention
0.47

Language is NOT Portuguese

Speaker addressing member of same r

Language IS Portuguese

Speaker addressing

official equivalent
0.53

Audience IS Black

Audience is NOT Black

official equivalent
0.86

official equivalent
0.77

intervention
0.88

official equivalent
0.85

inte

IVALENT AND
COMMON TRANSLATION
ACIAL LANGUAGE

tegy

Official Equivalent

Intervention

Label

race

member of different race

ervention
0.52

▶▶┃ Spanish translations rely more heavily on official equivalents while Portuguese translations use intervention and official equivalents at similar frequencies

▶▶┃ Portuguese translators are more comfortable intervening on culture-bound phaseologisms to avoid sounding awkward

▶▶┃ Portuguese translations are done predominantly in Brazil, which has historically been more open to racial dialogue than European nations like Spain and Portugal

CONCLUSION II: AA FILM AND COMMONLY SCREENED IN EUROP

Where African American Films Are Screened

Number

30

20

10
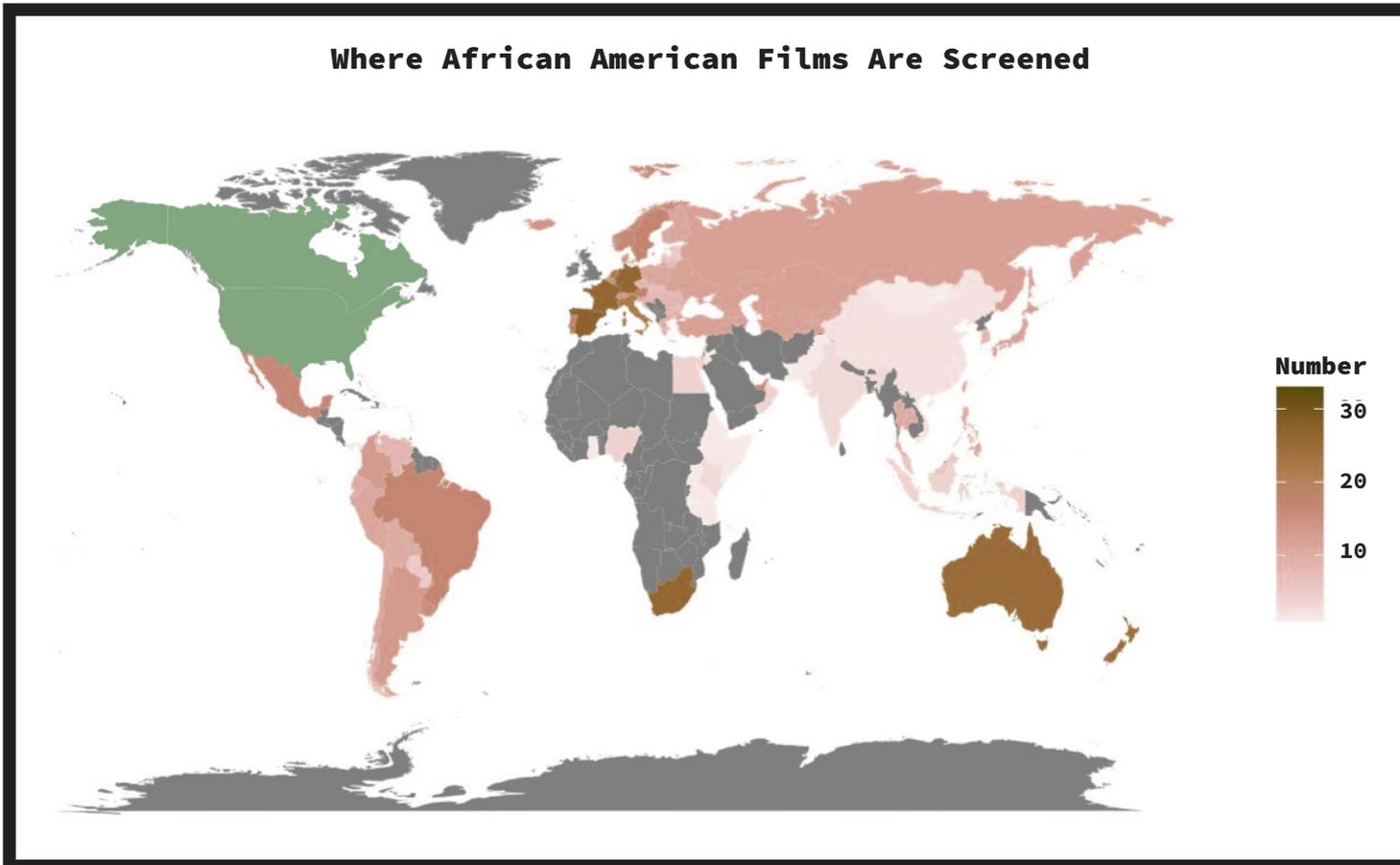
⏭ English and European language speaking
dom, France, South Africa, and Australia
film screenings.

⏭ European language speaking countries, a
see the highest concentration of AA lite

⏭ Contiental Africa shows a very low conc
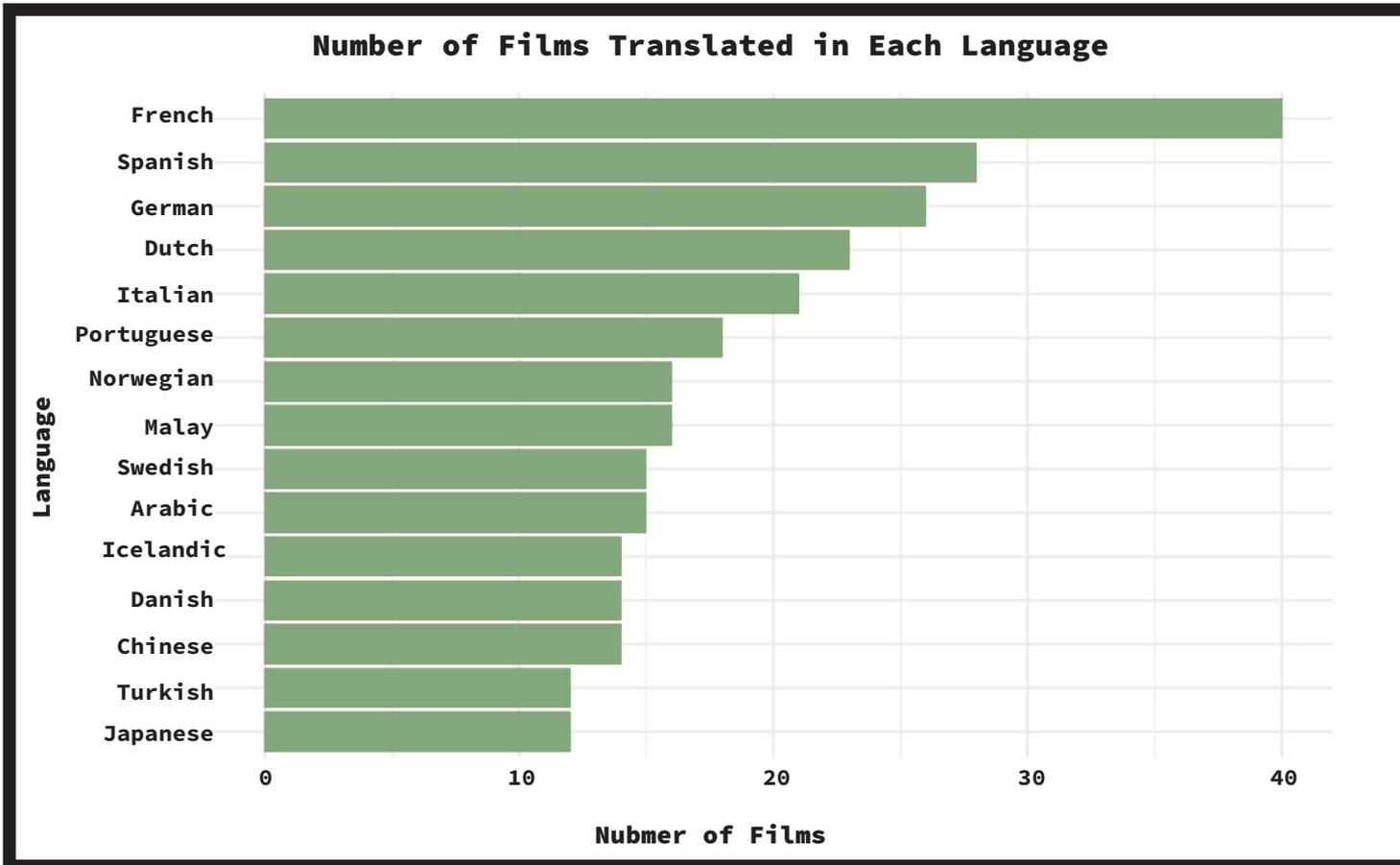
LITERATURE IS MOST
E (GEOGRAPHIC)

Where African American Books Are Published
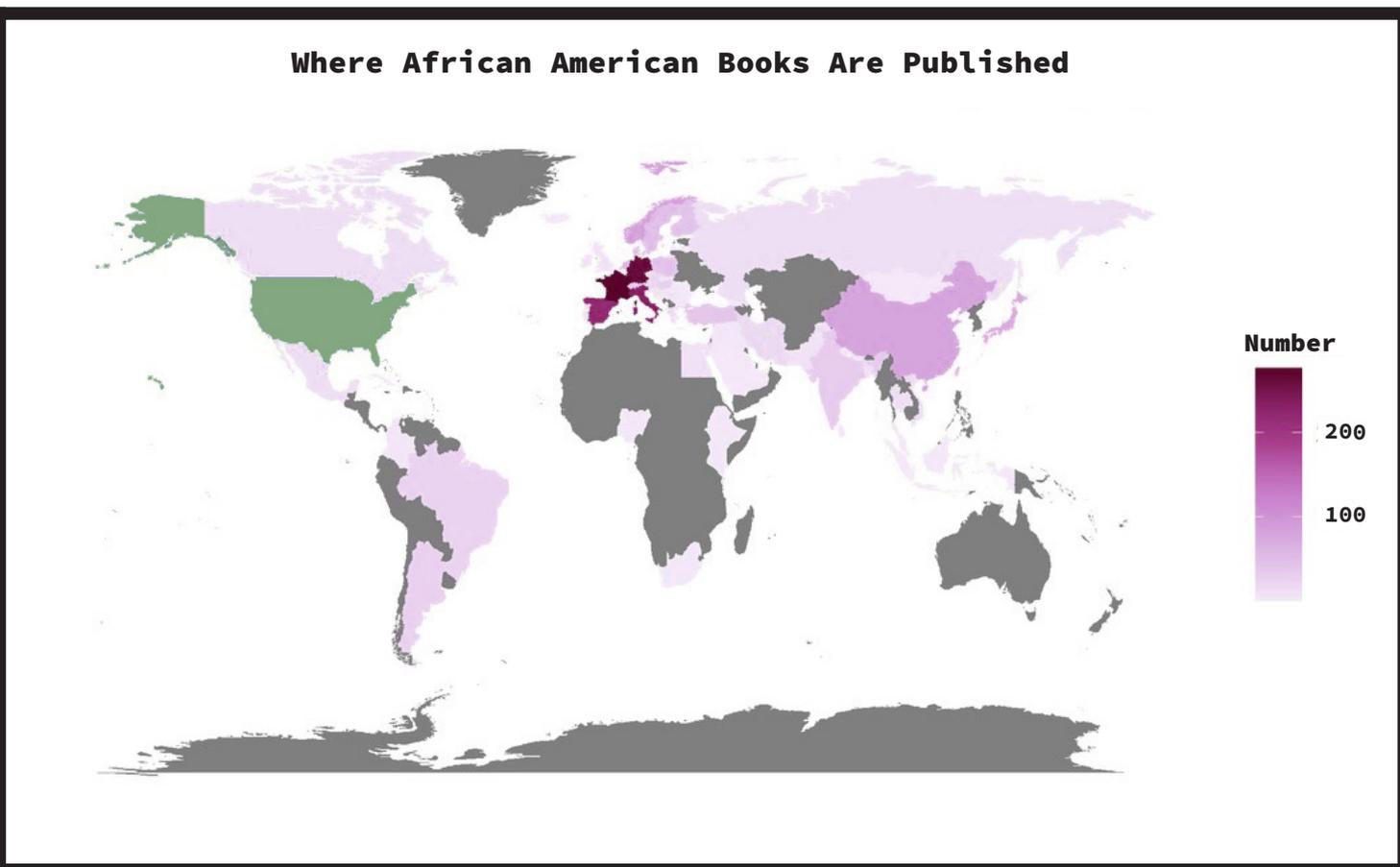
countries, specifically the United King-
, see the highest concentration of AA

specifically Central and Southern Europe,
erature publications abroad
centration of AA film and literature

CONCLUSION III: AA FILM AN COMMONLY TRANSLATED TO WES (LINGUISTIC)

Number of Films Translated in Each Language

Language	Number of Films
French	40
Spanish	28
German	26
Dutch	23
Italian	21
Portuguese	18
Norwegian	16
Malay	16
Swedish	15
Arabic	15
Icelandic	14
Danish	14
Chinese	14
Turkish	12
Japanese	12

▶▶ French, Spanish, and German are the three most common languages of translation for AA film

▶▶ German, French, and Spanish are the three most common languages of trasnlation for AA literature

▶▶ The most common languages of translation are used in countries with a history of being colonizers

Number of Books Translated in Each Language

Language	Number of Books
German	~320
French	~295
Spanish	~265
Italian	~240
Chinese	~135
Korean	~85
Danish	~85
Japanese	~70
Dutch	~60
Swedish	~50
Norwegian	~45
Polish	~43
Finnish	~42
Turkish	~42
Portuguese	~35
Hungarian	~33
Hebrew	~28
Arabic	~22
Vietnamese	~18
Czech	~18

Number of Books
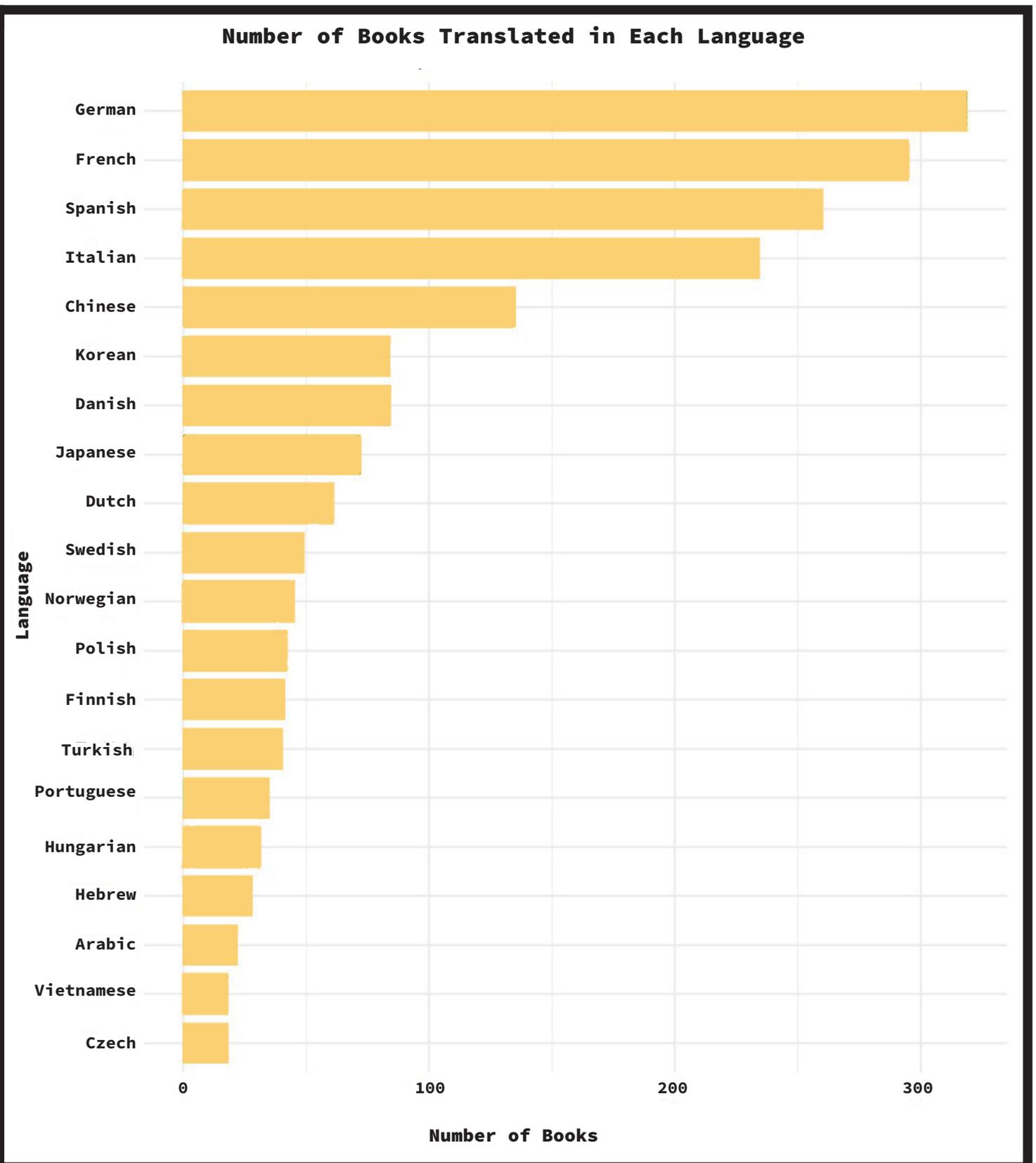
CONCLUSION IV: AA FILMS HA
INCREASING FREQUENCY SINCE

Number of Film Market Releases by Year

Number of Releases

80

60

12 Years a

40

Precious

The Secret Life of Bees   If Be

20

Antwone Fisher   I Am

Brown Sugar   Cadillac Records

Boyz n the Hood

0   Bamboozled   The Great Debaters

1990   2000   2010

Opening Date

r

Into the Spider-Verse

Get Out

Black Panther
Slave
BlacKkKlansman

Night School
A Wrinkle in Time
eale Street Could Talk
Girls Trip

Fences
Not Your Negro

Mudbound
Harriet
13th

2020

▶▶▏ Recent AA films like "Get Out," "Black Panther," and "Us" have proven that movies with majority Black casts can be big blockbusters (comps, in filmspeak), creating an uptick in releases around 2018

▶▶▏ Markets must be crafted for Black stories before they can travel in a global market, as they require a "proof of concept" that films with predominantly white casts often do not

▶▶▏ Potentially signaling a narrowing of the Racial Empathy Gap

CONCLUSION V: HISTORY AND TRANSLATED GENRES AMONG AA

Mean Number of Market Releases by Genr
(minimum 5 films)

re

romance
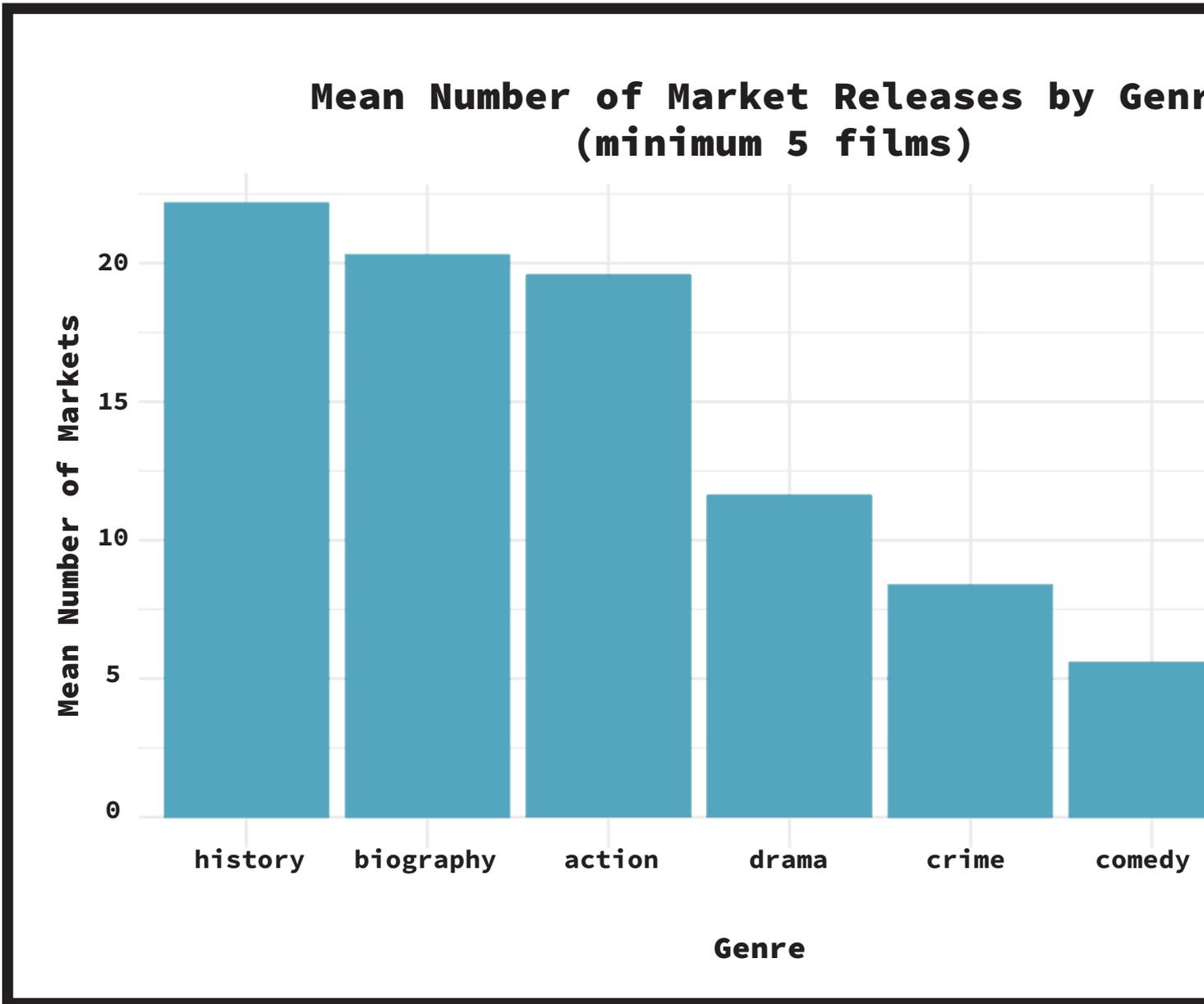
▶▶ History and Biography can be relegated to the past by white audiences

▶▶ Historical and biographical accuracy necessitate Black characters while other genres make roles more race-neutral or open to interpretation

▶▶ Blackness often associated with victimhood, which leads to the fetishization of Black trauma and pain

▶▶ Narratives of victimization prevent the creation of dynamic Black characters that exhibit love and life outside of violent contexts

▶▶ American awards often-prioritize Black films that depict Black pain and suffering

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS + ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

0.1 AS RESEARCHERS, WE HAVE OUR OWN RACIAL BIASES.

The research team acknowledges that they all come from different walks of life and their respective backgrounds influcence the way in which they approach the data, consciously or not. They hoped to have mitigated the effects of this by engaging in critical dialogue with one another on a regular basis and using the team's diversity to keep one perspective from dominating the discourse. However, their analysis of the data is undoubtedly still influenced by the ways in which they've previously interacted with and been educated about race.

0.2 THERE IS NO SINGLE "BLACK STORY."

The research team acknowledges that "Black story" is a nebulous term that can have multiple definitions. For the purposes of this project, a "Black story" was understood to be any work of literature or film that had a Black author/director and featured a predominantly Black cast of characters. In these works, there exists an emphasis on the Black gaze and the Black perspective is central to the narrative. There are many other ways of defining this, but the reasearch team felt these parameters allowed them to create what they believed to be a "representative" corpus of data.

0.3 RACIAL + RACIALIZED LANGUAGE MUST BE APPROACHED WITH CARE.

The reasearch team acknowledges that the language of race is also the language of power. A racialized or racial word is not just a word. It carries with it a history of violence, oppression, and discrimination that continues to this day. Therefore, this language much be approached with care and inclusivity. Although the team sought to discuss the data freely, they also recognize that much of the language they analyze is derogatory. To enable open discourse, they assigned each term a number and referred to this number instead of the word itself when referencing the data.

FURTHER READING...

ABOUT THE DATA...

MODELS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTS FOR TRANSLATION STRATEGY

PHASE I TERM-LEVEL ANALYSIS

PHASE I EXPLORATORY DATA ANALYSIS

IMDB EXPLORATORY DATA ANALYSIS

WORLDCAT EXPLORATORY DATA ANALYSIS

ABOUT THE ANALYSIS...

DISPROVING THE 'BLACK FILMS DON'T TRAVEL' HOLLYWOOD MYTH

WHY WHITE PEOPLE DON'T LIKE BLACK MOVIES

TRANSLATING POETRY, TRANSLATING BLACKNESS

HARD TIMES FOR BLACK WRITERS

WHY WON'T HOLLYWOOD LET US SEE OUR BEST BLACK ACTORS?

WAKE