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Indigenous long-distance runners and the globalisation of sport in the 1930s. The Tarahumara (Rarámuri) in the photography of the sports reporter Arthur E. Grix

In the early 1930s the Tarahumara, an indigenous ethnic group from northern Mexico known today by their self-designation Rarámuri, acquired a certain degree of international notoriety among anthropologists. Konrad Theodor Preuss, curator at the *Museum für Völkerkunde* (today: *Ethnologisches Museum*) in Berlin, knew about them above all through the popular travelogues and photographs that the Norwegian Carl Lumholtz and the German Rudolf Zabel had published in 1902 and 1928 respectively. But after Preuss heard a lecture held by the sports reporter Arthur E. Grix in Berlin, he got to know a different side of this Mexican native people:

It was a great pleasure to hear such a detailed account of the athletic achievements of these Indians in your presentation about your trip to the Tarahumara. It is in fact also of importance for the discipline of anthropology to have authentic information about things such as stamina, both in terms of the distances covered and in terms of speed.¹

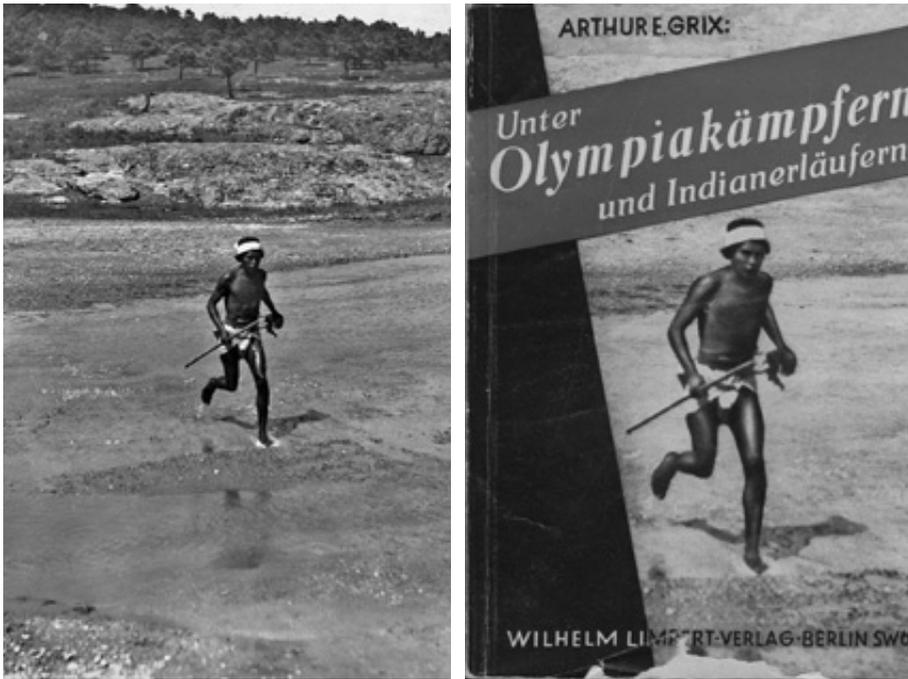
Arthur E. Grix (1893–1966) handed Berlin's *Museum für Völkerkunde* over seven photographs that he had taken during his trip to the Tarahumara in northern Mexican state of Chihuahua in 1932 after attending the Olympic Games in Los Angeles.² The “Tarahumara Runners”³ as he called them on two of the photographs were the purpose of this spontaneous excursion by train to the town of Creel. The sports reporter had travelled across the United States from New York to Los Angeles in July 1932 to report on the Olympic Games in August. In his books *Olympische Tage in Los Angeles* (1932) and *Unter Olympiakämpfern und Indianerläufern* (1935) he describes vividly this mass event in which “100,000 people [...] scuttle in a giant stone tub like insects on a sweet crust”.⁴ Grix was himself an athlete “dedicated with every fibre [of my body] to sports and the track and field disciplines” since the age of sixteen.⁵ He learned to box in a British prisoner-of-war camp during the First World War and became so impassioned about this sport that he founded the boxing division of his hometown *Sportclub Charlottenburg*.⁶ He was editor-in-chief of the club newspaper, the *Schwarzes C*, from 1933 to 1935. Grix had various jobs in the period that followed

and developed significant influence in sports reporting in Germany during that time, that is, in the politically critical period leading up to and in the early years of the National Socialist regime.

In the following, Grix' photographs of the Tarahumara form a point of departure for an analysis of how sports reporters and functionaries in Mexico and Germany perceived this North American ethnic group in the interwar period. Grix transported in his books using text and image his own personal perspective on the Olympic idea and the globalisation of sports. The indigenous people of Mexico and their concept and practice of 'sports'⁷ played an important role in his own concept of the broader social significance of sport. It was no coincidence that the Rarámuri runners caught his eye. Mexican sports officials had heard reports about their spectacular running abilities and identified in them potential participants in international athletics events. In initial competitions in which especially the endurance of the runners was tested, men ran distances of 100 km and more and women showed an almost equally remarkable endurance. Such distances, comparable to today's ultra-marathons, were at the time still unusual in international athletics. Rarámuri long-distance runners, both men and women, took part in competitions designed specifically for them at the University of Austin, Texas. These took place in the run-up to the Pan American Games in 1926, which were regarded at the time as the Olympics of the Americas. Rarámuri participated in the regular long distance and marathon competitions in these Pan American Games and in the marathon in the Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928. Pictures of the successful indigenous runners decorated the sports pages of the major newspapers in Mexico City and the southwestern United States.

One such newspaper found its way into Arthur Grix' hands after the Olympic Games in Amsterdam, the headline reading "Mexican Indian runners Win in Texas". The accompanying picture showed, so Grix "a running dark-skinned man in a loin-cloth" and the article reported on a race over 144-kilometres that the University of Texas had held on 25 March 1927.⁸ The Rarámuri Tomás Zafiro ran this distance in 14 hours, 53 minutes.⁹ The German sports reporter decided to "get to the bottom of the racing stamina of this legendary Indian people".¹⁰ He eventually organised in Creel in Chihuahua, Mexico, a marathon-distance race to test the performance of the Tarahumara. His goal was to find out if they could break the then world record of 2 hours, 31 minutes, 36 seconds set by the Argentinian Juan Carlos Zabala at the Los Angeles Olympics.¹¹

Five of the seven photographs found in archive of the *Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin were published by Grix in *Unter Olympiakämpfern und Indianerläufern*, a book that intended to address a broad audience. One of them entitled *Wettläufer der*



- 1 A runner named Aurelio. Photographer: Arthur E. Grix, 1932. EMB, VIII E Nis 487.
- 2 The cover of *Unter Olympiakämpfern und Indianerläufern*. Photographer: Arthur E. Grix, 1932.

Tarahumara graces the cover of the book as well. On page 144 the same photograph showing the Tarahumara runner Aurelio Francisco has the caption “Aurelio Crosses a River”.¹² It shows a young man in a typical summer outfit used when running as well, clothing that is common for many Rarámuri men in the countryside today, that is, a white cotton loincloth (*sitagora*) held up by a woven belt. Aurelio Francisco’s hair is tied using a wide headband (*coyera*) also of white fabric. The view selected in this photograph suggests that he is running surrounded by nature alone and is in this instant crossing a river. The runner himself is slightly out of focus.¹³

This chapter is based on the hypothesis that this and other photographs form part of processes in the course of which in the first decades of the 20th century nations such as Mexico and Germany began to define themselves in terms of athletics and in which, in turn, the Tarahumara were conceded a fixed place, albeit as ‘others’, in a globalised sports community. This indigenous people and their running culture were interpreted and evaluated in diverse ways that I will discuss in the following. By dint of these ascribed meanings to Rarámuri running, Mexico acquired a new status as an international sporting nation. In Germany, interpretations of Tarahumara athletics

also played a role for an understanding of modern sport which emerged in the 1930s in which National Socialist ideas about human 'races' possessing basically different athletic skills were integrated.

Photographs provide a particular window on such global dynamics, as Deborah Poole¹⁴ and John Mraz¹⁵ have shown in their discussions about the essential role which the production, circulation and consumption of photographs assume for the development of perceptions, ideas and feelings about gender, 'race', ethnicity and nation. Poole understands the production, circulation, consumption and possession of images that travel locally and translocally to be part of a "visual economy".¹⁶ This concept takes the fact into account that the field of the visual has always been pervaded by social relations, inequality and power. Sarah Corona Berkin's analysis¹⁷ shows specifically how the photographic genre of the "Mexican indigene" constructs its object on the basis of temporality (the indigenes are allocated to the past), spatiality (they are part of nature) culture markers (perceived as exotic) and homogeneity ('the' indigenes are poor, backward, static). She points out that such attributions are crucial for creating new social realities since photographic images are commonly perceived as representing reality. From the perspective of these three approaches I will examine to what extent Grix' photographs reproduced, modified or counteracted contemporary stereotypes about the Tarahumara.

The Tarahumara runners as Mexican sports icons

First I will discuss the events that contributed to the Tarahumara, a hitherto little-known ethnic group, coming to wider public attention in the transnational context of Mexico-USA at the end of the 19th century. Photographs and descriptions based on photographs played here a special role as demonstrated by the international public attention the Tarahumara received in 1902 when Carl Lumholtz' richly illustrated two-volume work *Unknown Mexico* was published. This book soon became a standard work on the indigenous peoples of northwestern Mexico. Lumholtz combined scholarly and commercial interests as a travel writer and had already published several popular books on his expeditions, among them, *Among Cannibals* (1889), an account of his journey to the Aborigines of Australia. In the course of several extended expeditions to northern Mexico he on one hand recorded the way of life of the Tarahumara in a differentiated and sophisticated manner by using ethnographic methods such as participant observation. But on the other hand he appraised this native people through the lens of the prevailing evolutionary paradigm and considered them to be a survival of an earlier stage in human evolution. When he discovered in 1892

during his first expedition that many Rarámuri lived in caves, he interpreted this as evidence of them having preserved their primitive state and authenticity. Fascinated, Lumholtz considered the Rarámuri to be “American cave-dwellers of the present age”.¹⁸ He hoped that through this research he would be able to attain knowledge about the way of life of the prehistoric inhabitants of the American southwest and the stone-age peoples of Europe.¹⁹

In *Unknown Mexico*, Lumholtz also stylised the Tarahumara by means of photographs into troglodytes and cave-dwellers. An example is the drawing based on a photograph of a somewhat reserved looking young woman dressed in the common everyday clothing of her day: she wore basically only a woollen skirt tied with a woven belt and went topless, exposing her breasts.²⁰ The choice of the motif and the caption “The Belle of the Cave” stylises the young woman into a timeless cave dweller, even if Lumholtz explicitly denies a direct link to prehistoric cave dwellers in the text. Many other drawings in *Unknown Mexico* that are based on photographs he took in a documentary style also convey a pristine image of the Rarámuri and their everyday lives untouched by ‘civilisation’.

This is also the case for Lumholtz’ photographs of Rarámuri runners taken in the vicinity of the community of Naráachi.²¹ Their races are discussed in detail in chapter XV of *Unknown Mexico*, which is dedicated to games, gambling and foot-races. Lumholtz reflects on the running skills of the Tarahumara only once from the perspective of Western athletics when he ponders over their degree of competitiveness in track and field events.²² He is more interested in the principles according to which the Tarahumara organised their races. Usually, several men (or women) divided into two teams and competed against one another in a test of endurance and not of speed. The two teams raced along established trails in the wilderness along low-lying ridges kicking a small wooden ball while running. The competitions, which were prepared and convened by specialised ‘managers,’ drew up to 200 spectators, including men, women and children. The spectators divided in two parties and bet goods such as woollen blankets and arrows on the runners and spent the entire morning making these bets, which were taken and memorised by the managers. The drawings based on photographs that illustrate this ethnographic description are documentary in style and are provided with descriptive captions such as “Tarahumares Racing by Torch-light” and “Making Wagers at a Foot-race”.

Only the caption of the picture titled “Tarahumare Foot-runners, Photographed After the Race” breaks the mould since it comments on the situation immediately after the race in which the original photograph was taken. The picture shows five men standing in a row, with serious expressions and crossed arms, though not looking at



3 "Tarahumare Foot-runners. Photographed after the Race." Photographer: Carl Lumholtz, 1902: 291.

all exhausted. Their appearance does not suggest in the slightest that they could be somewhat out of breath after their ultra-marathon. It can be assumed that they had just finished a race over a standard distance of about 100 km. The drawing/photograph therefore 'proves' something that Lumholtz addresses explicitly elsewhere in this chapter devoted to games in relation to the ability of Rarámuri men to run down wild horses:

It may take them two or three days, but they will bring them in, the horses thoroughly exhausted, while the men, who, of course, economise their strength, and sleep, and eat pinole, are comparatively fresh.²³

Unknown Mexico was also read in Mexico and contributed to an appreciation of the Tarahumara as 'people with culture' in the eyes of the Mexican politicians, who considered themselves *blancos* (whites).²⁴ A new kind of interest in the Tarahumara emerged in the course of which the state government of Chihuahua commissioned scholarly research.²⁵ In this period, that is, in 1906, the state Governor Enrique Creel enacted the *Ley de Mejoramiento de la Raza Tarahumara*,²⁶ one of the first indigenous laws of independent Mexico. During the Mexican Revolution, Chihuahua played a prominent role due to its location in the extreme north of the country on the border

to the United States. Peasants and other members of the lower class rose up and joined, among others, Pancho Villa, because they had lost their land during the Porfiriato, that is, the rule of dictator Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911). After the Mexican Revolution, the Tarahumara and the ethnically mixed region of the Sierra Tarahumara (a part of the Sierra Madre Occidental) were the focus of first pacification measures. The agrarian reform was therefore implemented very quickly after the end of armed conflicts in the rural region inhabited by the Tarahumara.²⁷

New post-revolutionary Mexican government institutions, such as the *Secretaría de Educación*²⁸ under José Vasconcelos initiated several anthropological studies in this period. They implemented a national indigenous policy aiming at ‘incorporating’ the native groups into the nation conceived as a homogeneous mestizo entity – that is, to culturally de-indigenise them. Scientific findings on the Tarahumara published in a monograph were to serve these purposes. In 1925, the Ministry of Education commissioned Carlos Basauri to write this anthropological monograph on the “Tarahumara tribe” and collect the necessary data on their “physical, mental and ethnographic characteristics” to do so. The study, which was published in 1926 included documentary-style photographs that had little of the artistic ambition that can be seen in those taken by Lumholtz. The photographs were clearly included as matter-of-fact visual evidence of Tarahumara socio-cultural practices and institutions described in the text. Despite the explicit intention of delivering a neutral documentation, Carlos Basauri and his brother Manuel – a physician – paint an often extremely negative and denigrating picture of the Tarahumara, for example in their discussion of issues of nutrition and the consumption of corn beer.²⁹ They argued, that because of their “deficient diet” based primarily on corn the Tarahumara were obviously a “physiologically degenerated race”.³⁰

In the contemporary Mexican press, by contrast, the Tarahumara were shown in a completely different, much more positive light, namely as modern long-distance runners who would be able to achieve Olympic glory for the Mexican nation.³¹ The running talent of the Rarámuri was identified in the 1920s by Mexican sports officials as a possible resource for the Mexican nation. The well-known artist and muralist Dr Atl suggested in 1923 that the Tarahumara run in the coming Olympics, arguing that the Mexican national Olympic team, which would take part for the first time in the Olympics in the following year, would otherwise have little chance of winning any medals.³² This reappraisal of the Tarahumara based on their athletic prowess took place in the context of the early globalisation of sports. In the 1920s, modern competitive sport began to develop in close alliance with new communication technologies its very own form of globalisation. With sport’s international diffusion, a whole range of instruments for measuring athletic achievements were developed to standardise

competition conditions for all contestants; they became part of the mass events witnessed and commented on by a large audience.³³ Many countries were eager to join in this development since the successful participation in such athletic competitions promised a gain in international prestige. This sparked ambitions for creating the disciplines and determining athletic parameters on the basis of which athletic excellence would be measured and compared around the world. Countries that wanted to introduce their 'own', indigenous athletic disciplines to international competitions did so in the belief that this would allow them to increase their chances in winning sports competitions. The long-distance running disciplines became extremely popular in the beginning of the 1920s, both in the United States and internationally, propelled in part by running star Paavo Nurmi.³⁴ Indigenous runners from the United States who had placed well in national competitions also contributed to their attractiveness.³⁵

It was in this context that Mexican sports officials – who were very enthusiastic about the Olympic idea – discovered the Tarahumara running prowess. They wanted to introduce a 100-kilometre race as a new standard distance in the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam. In the course of this campaign, Mexico hosted in November 1926, jointly with Cuba and Guatemala, the first transregional sporting event in the world, the *Juegos Deportivos Centroamericanos*,³⁶ a Central American version of the Olympic Games.³⁷ It included a 100-kilometre race from Pachuca to Mexico City to finish in the new National Stadium. The event was specifically designed to test the running talent of two young Tarahumara men. Tomás Zafiro and Leoncio San Miguel completed the course in 9 hours, 37 minutes and became thus the first world record holders. Both the Mexican press and the major newspapers published in the southwestern United States reported at length on this sporting spectacle.³⁸

A few months later this Tarahumara Race was promoted in a fancy pamphlet with the title *Pro México* that was distributed in a bilingual Spanish-English version and included numerous photographs. The cover of the pamphlet already announced it as “The world’s greatest record-breaking race in the annals of sporting history established by the Chihuahua Mountain Indians of the Mexican Republic”. There Tarahumara were reconceptualised as valuable Mexican citizens because they were physically fit and internationally competitive. The introduction explains that the *carrera* Tarahumara “will not only make known the extraordinary faculties of the Chihuahua Mountains Indians” but “will oblige the public to abandon the black lies that foreigners as a rule tell of Mexico, through ignorance and calumny, by denying this country all its national achievements”.³⁹ This shift in the image of the Tarahumara after the success of the 100-kilometre event was reflected upon by the journalist Jacobo Dalevuelta in his chapter entitled *The Indian, Mexico’s Redeemer*:



- 4 “The Tarahumara Race, Tarahumara foot runner in modern jerseys”. In: *Pro México*, 1927: 7 and 9.

What will those people say now when two Indians such as the Tarahumares, whom we thought were only able to get drunk on ‘tixhuino’ or poison themselves with ‘peyote,’ have astonished the civilised world with this puissant physical demonstration of theirs such as the ‘Tarahumara Race’ actually was?⁴⁰

Pro México transports an innovative image of the Mexican indigenous population, especially in its photographs of the Tarahumara. These photographs have little in common with the aesthetics of the anthropological photographs taken by Lumholtz or Basauri. Rather, in *Pro México* the runners Tomás Zafiro and Leoncio San Miguel are shown in individual portraits and therefore as modern individuals and in action shots conventional of sports reporting of the time. Portraying them in their jerseys also conveys the image of modern athletes, even if they continue to wear their traditional sandals laced with leather straps.⁴¹ Another photograph shows the men wearing straw hats while running into the National Stadium in Mexico City.⁴² After finishing the

race both are portrayed together with General Serrano, governor of Mexico City.⁴³ The latter two images had already been published in the 8 November 1926 edition of the newspaper *El Universal* under the headline “A New World Record in Running”. Only one photo in the book does not conform to this pattern, a group portrait of ten young Tarahumara men wrapped in blankets standing in a photo studio. They are accompanied by José Járís from Siquirichi, who in the caption is identified as *gobernaldorillo*⁴⁴ of his tribe and as having brought these young people to the capital city and the new government boarding house *Casa del Estudiante Indígena*.⁴⁵ That said, this photograph also reinforces the overall statement that the Tarahumara were firmly anchored in the present. The photos in *Pro México* show them as athletic runners, as sports heroes next to the capital’s governor and as ambitious young men eager to visit the government boarding school.

The two Tarahumara runners from Mexico performed disappointingly at the Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928. The legend of their running skills as a globally competitive resource lived on nevertheless. Photographs of the Rarámuri as sensational runners are popular in Mexico even today, since they convey the image of the Mexican nation’s athletic strength.⁴⁶

The Tarahumara runners from the perspective of a German traveller and sports reporter

These two perspectives on the Tarahumara in Mexico in the 1920s show how different the images were which anthropologists and Mexican journalists conveyed of them: during the same period photographs of the Rarámuri were taken, selected and published according to interests in communicating different messages. Since the legendary Tarahumara runners were a key element of the project of winning Olympic gold, Mexican sports officials diffused an image of them as valuable representatives of the Mexican nation at international sporting events, thereby changing the up to then prevailing negative stereotype of this indigenous population in national indigenist policy.

The German sports reporter Arthur E. Grix, in contrast, departed from an image of aboriginal people that was influenced by the then predominant cultural-history school of German anthropology. Karl Weule (1864–1926) published in his function as director of the *Museum für Völkerkunde* in Leipzig his then groundbreaking *Ethnologie des Sports* (1926) in which he cemented a dichotomy between primitive and civilised sports.⁴⁷ Although there is no direct evidence that Grix read Weule’s work, he argued from a similar perspective. Grix classified the Tarahumara as a *Naturvolk* (= primitive people) that did not have the same athletic potential as *Kulturmenschen* or ‘civilised

nations' because of their way of life in the 'undeveloped craggy mountains'.⁴⁸ Grix mainly remarked that the two Tarahumara runners, who participated in the marathon at the Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928 "A. Terrazas as well as J. Torres [finished] in the field of losers," running a time "a good piece away from the world record anyhow". For this reason he concluded that: "The marathon distance requires a certain speed, good pace and intelligent training – all things that are foreign to the Tarahumara".⁴⁹

To what extent did the experiences and impressions that Grix gained during his trip to Mexico and organising a marathon in the village of Creel change his mind about the Tarahumara and the role that this *Naturvolk* had in modern sport?

Grix went to Mexico immediately after the closing of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. His experience of this mega sports event therefore gives some clues as to his perspectives on sports. The modern Olympic Games are structured as a competition between nations; in this field assumptions about the relationship between national identity and athletic prowess are negotiated and expressed. Grix too was interested in the link between national identity, 'race' and class. In the first chapter of *Unter Olympiakämpfern und Indianerläufern* he lets the reader in his understanding of these categories as tied to athletic performance. He describes three Olympic track and field medalists: an English nobleman, a farm boy from Kansas, whose grandfather was a 'half-breed Indian,' and a young, blond German who, a sickly child, took up track and field at the recommendation of his paediatrician.⁵⁰ Grix thus draws on a number of common sports tropes of his time such as the belief in social mobility that sport offers even to the most marginalised of people.⁵¹ For him the essence of sport consists in the training of a malleable human body, a principle which he summarises as follows:

These three so different runners move among many others that have been thrown together from around the globe. Sinister Finns sit on the grass beside grinning Japanese, hot-blooded Argentinians and cool Swedes. Every single person has his own fate. Nothing in their early childhood pointed to that they might once become Olympians. No rank, no protection, no noble origin can help. [...] Their only weapon is their body, which they have prepared tirelessly to deliver maximum proficiency.⁵²

The Tarahumara on the other hand, were for Grix a *Naturvolk* and he saw them as belonging to a completely opposite category to 'civilised man,' in which he of course allocated himself as a German white man. The last chapter of Grix' book is devoted specifically to the question of "(h)ow the athletic prowess of indigenous peoples can be assessed".⁵³ He discusses several Olympic victories which he considered to



5 "A cliff-dwelling belonging to a Tarahumara family."
Photographer: Arthur E. Grix,
1932. In: Grix, 1935, fig 11.
EMB, VIII E NIs 482.

be “surprising” ones, because they had been won by “negroes” and “Indians”. Grix forwarded a binary perspective on sport that discriminated the ‘other’. “Only the completely civilised are able to perform well athletically”.⁵⁴ That said, he is keen to incorporate and explain away the ‘unexpected’ exceptions, including the Tarahumara ‘running sensations’, in a way that does not undermine his racist assumptions on athletic performances.

In the first part of the book, Grix constructs the Tarahumara as a *Naturvolk* also by using 32 photographs as illustrations. He describes his first encounters with Tarahumara people as the outcome of his urgent desire to locate members in their caves and to photograph them in this ‘primitive’ context.⁵⁵ He describes his meeting face-to-face with the first Tarahumara as following:

My first thought is: God, is this a beautiful, noble race! What a difference between these primitives steeled by air and sun and the pot-bellied, short-armed and sweaty Mexicans from the area! He is small and delicate, no more than 1.60 meters tall, but sinewy and racy, not very muscular, but well proportioned.⁵⁶



- 6 “Old couple in front of their cave”. Photographer: Arthur E. Grix, 1932.
In: Grix, 1935, fig 12. EMB, VIII Nls 483.
- 7 “A hundred-year-old man”. Photographer: Arthur E. Grix, 1932.
In: Grix, 1935, fig 14. EMB, VIII E Nls 486.

The four photographs between pages 64 and 65 show “The Cave in the Cliff”, an “Old Couple in Front of their Cave”, “Mother and Child” and “A Hundred-year-old Man”.⁵⁷ These images convey an argument akin to that of the text. The “hundred-year-old” – taken in the extreme light of the sun – is a portrait of a grey-haired but fearless and vigorous looking man looking straight into the camera. The photograph is taken from below and frames the slightly tilted head at a slight diagonal slope – all aesthetic means characteristic of the photography of the time that imbues the portrait a dynamic quality.

The hundred-year-old man appears again in a chapter titled “Here we go”. Grix mentions him as one of the spectators of a Tarahumara race that he watched on 26 September 1932. In this race over a distance of 265 km, two teams from the communities of San Ignacio (Arareco) and Bocoyna ran against one another. The runners and their



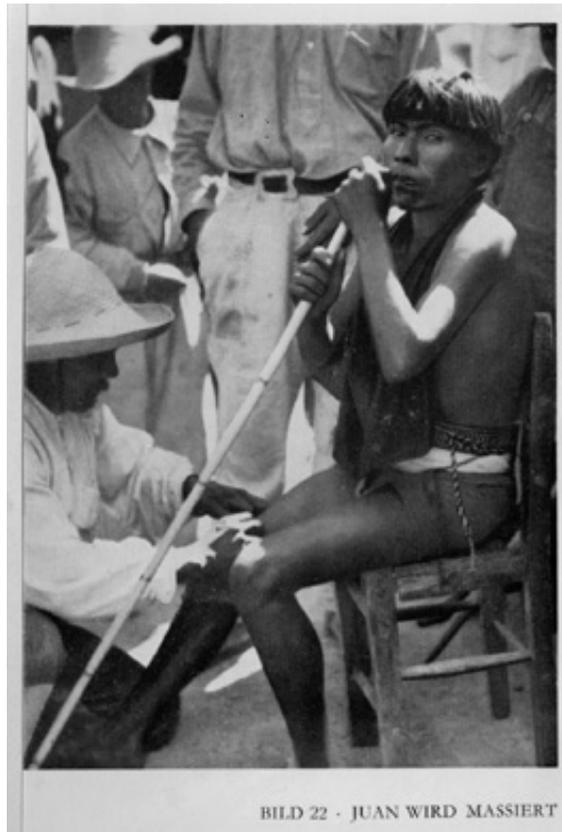
8 “Running sensations of the Sierra”. Photographer: Arthur E. Grix, 1932.
In: Grix, 1935, fig 19. EMB, VIII E Nls 488.

respective followers met in Creel between the two competing communities. In his description of the event, Grix combines his own observations with information – also of a speculative nature – that he obtained from his mestizo acquaintances in Creel and his own presuppositions. For example:

As I have heard, special training for the great *carrera* [race] is not required. Running is as innate to the Indians as it is for birds to fly.⁵⁸

Several photographs of the race are reproduced in the book. Figure 16 shows the German reporter on horseback, accompanied by two young Tarahumara men wrapped in blankets (“Young Runners Accompany Me”). Figures 17 and 18 have a documentary character and reveal some of the cultural features of Rarámuri running events, such as the extensive betting and the collection and accounting of these bets by specialised managers (“Wagers Guarded by the Indians”; “The Bookmaker”).⁵⁹

Figure 19, is entitled “Running Sensations of the Sierra” and is an action shot of two runners seen from the side running against a mountain ridge in the background. (In



9 “Juan is massaged”.
 Photographer: Arthur E. Grix,
 1932. In: Grix, 1935: 96-97,
 fig. 22.

the photo kept in the museum archive the caption reads “Runners of the Tarahumara”). Figure 20 shows several men standing with bamboo sticks in their hands (“At the Start of the *Carrera*”). Another action shot – Figure 21 – shows numerous runners and a supporter running alongside cheering them on (“After 18 hours”).⁶⁰ The motif in most of these photographs was framed in such a way that it does not include any non-indigenous elements, such as the mestizos who made up the majority of the inhabitants of the village of Creel.

Figure 22 (“Juan is Massaged”) is exceptional in this series.⁶¹ It is the only photograph to show the inter-ethnic context of the race. The portrayed runner Juan Masseira is sitting on a chair typical for a mestizo household and is being massaged by – judging by his clothes and his moustache – a mestizo. Grix mentions in the text that the mestizo inhabitants of Creel bet on the race as well, that is, they bet on the runners from Bocoyna (possibly because this community is located closer to Creel).

As the highlight of the narrative the German sports reporter discusses his experiment in the chapter “Aurelio’s Marathon”. Grix invited six Tarahumara and two mestizos to participate in a classical 42-kilometre marathon which they were to run without kicking the small wooden ball as would have been typical for local races. He offered the winner of this race a sack of beans. Grix was particularly pleased that Tomas Zafiro, who had finished in first place at the 144-kilometre race held at the University of Texas, would take part. He accompanied the runners in an old Ford car and took interim times every five kilometres. Grix is full of wonder of the running style of these indigenes and of the pace they set at the beginning of the race.⁶² But he attributes the sharp drop in the pace in the last third of the distance less to inexperience with the marathon format than to a lack of intellect.⁶³ Finally, a young runner named Aurelio Francisco crosses the finish line in a time of 2 hours, 50 minutes. In his subsequent analysis, Grix feels confirmed in a whole series of discriminatory assumptions, including that long-distance runners were “relatively primitive people” in comparison to sprinters. He seems keen to support the escalation in the global development of sports to increasingly quantifiable performances with his arguments. Faster, higher stronger (*citius, altius, fortius*) was the motto of the modern Olympic Games. Still, Grix admired the freshness with which Aurelio Francisco mastered the marathon distance, the almost playful ease with which he achieved “what our modern runners have only been able to accomplish since one generation, and that only by means of purposeful, intelligent training”.⁶⁴ But he also assumes that athletic qualities of a *Naturvolk* like the Tarahumara were determined genetically and less a result of a cultural achievement. In doing so he ignores the fact that the Tarahumara runners do train regularly for the local and regional races that take place according to a specific pattern between spring and autumn.⁶⁵

Grix’ detailed explanations for the amazing endurance of the Tarahumara, which he does respect as such, betray his difficulties in interpreting these athletic achievements according to his prefashioned evolutionist and racist model and values. He had to admit, that the runners of the marathon experiment were in good shape even without modern training, in better shape than their civilised contemporaries and in better condition than the Argentine marathon runner Zabala. Grix discusses in great detail the ‘perfect’, inherently athletic bodies of the Tarahumara runners which in his view were naturally given; in contrast modern, civilised men had to train laboriously to acquire such bodies.⁶⁶

Grix also conveys this inherent dynamism and vitality in individual portraits, such as that of the following young man. He chose to frame the photograph of this young man showing his turning face and one of his naked shoulders slightly from below. This



10 “Happy and satisfied”.
 Photographer: Arthur E. Grix,
 1932. In: Grix, 1935, fig 32.
 EMB, VIII E NIs 484.

perspective from below, the slight blur of the motion, the broad smile and waving hair of the young Rarámuri underline a feeling of dynamism and well-being. In total, the photographs chosen by Arthur E. Grix to show the Tarahumara are founded in an aesthetic that was already well established in the Weimar Republic that stressed dynamic movement, combative athleticism, physical presence and an enthusiastic zest for life.⁶⁷ Although he portrayed the Tarahumara as a *Naturvolk*, the aesthetics common of sports images he employed promote seeing them as the direct precursors of the modern athlete.

What effect did these photographs have on the German readers of the mid 1930s if we – as described at the beginning of this chapter – consider them part of a visual economy of an early globalisation of sport in which the Tarahumara were ascribed a fixed place? I have not been able to identify any other reception of Grix’ publication beyond the letter written by Preuss cited above. Grix’ photographs and accounts were published in the period after the Nacional Socialists’ seizure of power and in a time when Nazi popularity was at its highest and they must be understood in this context. The Nacional Socialists saw sport as a secular cult of physical strength and endurance that glorified winners and held losers in contempt.⁶⁸ Grix was not only a

member of the *Sportclub Charlottenburg* but also editor from September 1933 to 1935 of its club magazine *Schwarzes C*. A few months before taking up this position, that is, in the spring of 1933, the *Sportclub Charlottenburg* had introduced, like so many other clubs in Germany, a so-called Aryan paragraph into its charter and stripped its Jewish members of their membership status.⁶⁹ The club was also among the first to call into being a military athletics division (*Wehrsportabteilung*). Grix' reflections and photographic visualisation of the sports of the *Naturvolk* of the Tarahumara may from today's perspective appear as something not directly related with these developments in a German sports clubs and German politics. However, they do fit well into this time since they could easily be read as a confirmation of the different physical attributes that Nazi propaganda saw as separating the 'human races' and that it ascribed to allegedly fundamental differences in their athletic prowess.

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Notes

- 1 "Es war mir eine große Freude, bei Ihrem Vortrag über Ihre Reise zu den Tarahumara eine so eingehende Darstellung der sportlichen Leistungen dieser Indianer zu vernehmen. Es ist in der Tat auch für die Ethnologie von Bedeutung, authentische Angaben über die Laufleistungen sowohl bezüglich der zurückgelegten Wege als auch bezüglich der dabei gebrauchten Zeiten zu haben.", Grix 1935, 3. So Preuss in a letter to Grix that the latter reprinted in the foreword of *Unter Olympiakämpfern und Indianerläufern*. The reporter was thrilled about this recognition on the part of academia, noting that he had visited the Tarahumara as a mere 'traveller, athlete and photographer' and not as a scholar.
- 2 I assume Grix took the initiative and offered the photos to the Museum but have not found any correspondence on the subject that might verify this. It may well be the case that Grix and Preuss first met on the occasion of the mentioned lecture.
- 3 *Wettläufer der Tarahumara*.
- 4 "100.000 Menschen [...] in einer steinernen Riesenwanne kribbeln wie Insekten auf einer süßen Kruste", Grix 1935, 6–7.
- 5 "dem Sport und insbesondere der Leichtathletik mit allen Fasern [meines Körpers] verfallen", Grix 1932, 5.

- 6 Cf. [http://www.literaturport.de/index.php?id=26&user_autorenlexikonfrontend_pii\[al_aid\]=781&user_autorenlexikonfrontend_pii\[al_opt\]=1&cHash=3c339ce7598076293e9af699a2691b29](http://www.literaturport.de/index.php?id=26&user_autorenlexikonfrontend_pii[al_aid]=781&user_autorenlexikonfrontend_pii[al_opt]=1&cHash=3c339ce7598076293e9af699a2691b29)
- 7 To capture the changing place of sports in various societies and cultures over longer periods, it requires a broad and inclusive definition of sport as physically based competitive activities and body cultures. Until the late 1970s, many scholars assumed a structural difference between religiously motivated “traditional” sports and “modern” competitive athletics, Kummels 2013a.
- 8 “einen laufenden dunklen Menschen im Lendenschurz”, Grix 1935, 23.
- 9 Grix 1935, 24–25.
- 10 “den Laufleistungen eines sagenhaften Indianervolkes auf den Grund gehen”, Grix 1932, 26.
- 11 Grix 1935, 14.
- 12 “Aurelio nimmt einen Flusslauf”.
- 13 While the picture on the cover of the book was retouched with the intent to sharpen the image, the body of the runner and especially his face nevertheless display rough contours.
- 14 Poole 1997.
- 15 Mraz 2009.
- 16 Poole 1997, 8.
- 17 Corona Berkins 2011.
- 18 Lumholtz 1973 [1902], 160.
- 19 Cf. Lumholtz 1973 [1902], XII, 421. Lumholtz used the term cave-dwellers repeatedly in the titles of articles that he published about the Rarámuri. According to Thamm (1999, 11–12), the American fascination with this trope at the end of the 19th century can be tied to the desire to associate an American national identity with indigenous origins and thus project it far back into prehistory.
- 20 To be exact, this photograph was retouched for the publication. Lumholtz (1973 [1902], 170–171) does not say anything explicitly about this woman he called Belle, but he does address the relationship of the Tarahumara to their caves.
- 21 Lumholtz 1973 [1902], 276–295.
- 22 The running prowess of the Tarahumara in their own competitions was first mentioned by the Jesuits during the colonial period (Kummels 2001). Lumholtz describes their running skills as follows: “No doubt the Tarahumares are the greatest runners in the world, not in regard to speed, but endurance. A Tarahumare will easily run 170 miles without stopping”, 1973 [1902], 282. Elsewhere he writes: “They do not run at an extraordinary speed, but very steadily, hour after hour, mile after mile. Good runners make forty miles in six or eight hours. At one race, when they covered according to my calculations twenty-one miles in two hours, I timed the leading runner and found that he made 290 feet in nineteen seconds on the first circuit, and on the next in twenty-four seconds. At a race rehearsal I saw them cover four miles in half an hour”, Lumholtz 1973 [1902], 291–292.
- 23 Lumholtz 1973 [1902], 282.

- 24 Until that time the Chihuahuan *blancos* (whites) discriminated the Tarahumara in the spirit of colonialism as drunken and lazy *indios*. In scholarship the non-indigenous population of Mexico is mostly designated as mestizo in view of the homogenising national model of *mestizaje*. The dominant population in Chihuahua in contrast identified itself as *blancos* or *gente de razón* (rational people). *Indios* like the Rarámuri were denigrated as ‘others’ and as second class citizens that allegedly lacked a communal, sedentary lifestyle, rationality and other characteristics of ‘civilisation’, Kummels 2007, 140–145.
- 25 Kummels 2007, 155–163.
- 26 Law for the Improvement of the Tarahumara Race.
- 27 Kummels 2007, 150–151, 274.
- 28 Ministry of Education.
- 29 Basauri 1929, 35.
- 30 Basauri 1929, 35. *Raza* (race) was at that time considered to be based either on inherited and “psychological” (that is, internal) factors or (external) environmental factors. Basauri adhered to neo-Lamarckian ideas according to which an “improvement of the race” was possible by means of “social hygiene,” that is, better nutrition and the avoidance of alcoholic beverages such as corn beer, Kummels 2007, 162.
- 31 Kummels 2013b.
- 32 Dyreson 2004, 3.
- 33 Werron 2010.
- 34 Paavo Nurmi won the 10,000 metre race in the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp and dominated the long-distance running disciplines until 1932 when he was banned from the Olympic Games due to violating his amateur status.
- 35 Nabokov 1981, 182.
- 36 The Central American Sporting Games.
- 37 McGehee 1993, 314.
- 38 Dyreson 2004.
- 39 “[...] pone(r) de relieve las extraordinarias facultades de los indios de la Sierra de Chihuahua”, “sirve para llevar al público un aspecto de México, que en el extranjero borraría la leyenda negra que le niega, por obra de la ignorancia y la calumnia, todo motivo de elevación nacional”, Buendía Aguirre et al., 1927, 3.
- 40 “Qué dirán ahora, cuando dos indios, como los tarahumares, de quienes creíamos que sólo eran capaces de embriagarse con ‘tesgüino’ y de envenenarse con ‘peyote’, han asombrado al mundo entero en la pujante demostración física como fué la ‘Carrera Tarahumara?’”, Buendía Aguirre et al. 1927, 46. The black legend of the time was based on the fact that some regions of Mexico continued to be insecure after the end of the Revolution.
- 41 Buendía Aguirre et al. 1927, 7 and 9.
- 42 Buendía Aguirre et al. 1927, 11.
- 43 Buendía Aguirre et al. 1927, 13.
- 44 Little governor.
- 45 Buendía Aguirre et al. 1927, 17.
- 46 Kummels 2013b.
- 47 Blanchard 2000, 146.

- 48 Grix 1935, 26.
- 49 “sowohl A. Terrazas als auch J. Torres [endeten] im geschlagenen Felde” und rannten eine Zeit “was immerhin ein gutes Stück vom Weltrekord entfernt ist.” Aus diesem Grund zieht er den Schluss: “Die Marathonstrecke erfordert eben schon eine gewisse Schnelligkeit, gute Tempoverteilung und ein intelligentes Training – Dinge, die den Tarahumara fremd sind”, Grix 1935, 117.
- 50 Grix 1935, 8–9.
- 51 Cf. Walther 2007.
- 52 “Diese drei so verschiedenen Läufer bewegen sich unter vielen anderen, die der Weltball hier zusammengewürfelt hat. Finstere Finnen hocken auf dem Rasen, daneben lächelnde Japaner, heißblütige Argentinier, kühle Schweden. Jeder einzelne hat sein Schicksal. Nichts hat in ihren ersten Lebensjahren darauf hingedeutet, dass sie einst Olympiakämpfer sein werden. Hier hilft kein Rang, keine Protektion, keine vornehme Herkunft. [...] Ihr einziges Rüstzeug ist ihr Körper, den sie durch unermüdlige Arbeit zur Erzielung besonderer Leistungen hergerichtet haben”, Grix 1935, 9.
- 53 “Wie sind die sportlichen Leistungen der Naturvölker einzuschätzen?”, Grix 1935, 9.
- 54 “Es sind immer nur die vollkommen Zivilisierten, die sportlich leistungsfähig sind.”, Grix 1935, 176.
- 55 Grix 1935, 52–59.
- 56 “Mein erstes Empfinden ist: Gott, ist das ein schöner, edler Menschenschlag! Was für ein Unterschied zwischen diesen von Luft und Sonne gestählten Naturmenschen und den dickbäuchigen, kurzarmigen, fettbrünstigen Mexikanern der Umgebung! Er ist klein und zierlich, nicht größer als 1,60 Meter, doch sehnig und rassig, nicht besonders muskulös, aber durchwegs gut proportioniert.”, Grix 1935, 57.
- 57 “Die Wohnhöhle im Felsmassiv”, “Altes Paar vor der Wohnhöhle”, “Mutter und Kind” and “Ein Hundertjähriger”.
- 58 “Wie ich höre, ist ein besonderes Lauftraining für die große Carrera [Rennen] nicht erforderlich. Das Laufen ist den Indianern angeboren wie den Vögeln das Fliegen”, Grix 1935, 85.
- 59 “Junge Läufer begleiten mich”, “Wettobjekte von Indianern bewacht” “Der Buchmacher”.
- 60 “Die Wunderläufer der Sierra/Wettläufer der Tarahumara”, “Am Start der Carrera” and “Nach 18stündigem Lauf”.
- 61 “Juan wird massiert”, Grix 1935, fig. 22.
- 62 Grix 1935, 147.
- 63 Grix 1935, 152.
- 64 “unsere modernen Läufer erst seit einem Menschenalter durch zielbewußtes, intelligente Training erreicht haben.”, Grix 1935, 154.
- 65 On the complexity of Rarámuri races see Kummels 2001.
- 66 Grix 1935, 154–155.
- 67 Cf. Bode 2008.
- 68 Krüger 2003, 21.
- 69 Bahro 2009, 129.