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### Corriendo Educando or Teaching/Learning While Running

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#### Abstract

Indigenous ceremonial running is traced back many hundreds of years and generally forms part of larger ceremonial ways. Today, running functions as part of athletic events, although running can also function as a means to commemorate a past event (memory) and as a means to transmit ancestral or traditional knowledge. This article examines running as a means of learning and acquiring knowledge and as a method of teaching and raising consciousness. It also considers how ceremonial running has transformed the Tucson community, which has been involved in intense human rights struggles, particularly in the struggle to teach Ethnic Studies and examines the *testimonios* of the runners.

#### Introduction

*The Arizona desert is merciless in the summer; at 115 degrees, it can claim you at any given time. At 55 years of age, I have no clue what I'm doing running from Tucson to Phoenix in the middle of summer. I know the purpose of this 120-mile run: to defend Tucson Unified School District's Ethnic/Raza Studies program<sup>1</sup> which is under heavy attack by the state schools superintendant and the state legislature. What I don't know is what gave me the idea that my body could withstand the extreme heat of this inhospitable Arizona/Sonora desert.*

The 2009 run came about when Arizona state legislators attempted to eliminate Raza Studies via Senate Bill 1069, authored by then State Senator Jonathan Paton.<sup>2</sup> The Bill sought to outlaw the teaching of Ethnic Studies for Arizona's K-12 (kindergarten to year 12) students. The architect of the effort to eliminate Ethnic Studies was state schools' superintendent, Tom Horne. His primary arguments were that Tucson Unified School District's (TUSD) Raza Studies department was anti-American and that it was teaching un-American values, not rooted in Western (Greco-Roman) civilisation. What he was alluding to was that Raza Studies was teaching pre-Colombian ideas and values such as *In Lak' Ech* (You are my other me) and *Panche Be* (To seek the root of the truth). These ideas constitute the philosophical foundation for the department.<sup>3</sup> He further alleged, beginning in 2006 that the students were being taught to think of themselves as members of an oppressed group, Indigenous Mexican Americans, as opposed to being taught as individuals. This argument was based on the fact that the department stresses a social justice perspective. The Arizona Bill emerged within the context of not just other harsh anti-Mexican and anti-immigrant legislation,<sup>4</sup> but also amid the many thousands of deaths of Mexican migrants along the United States/Mexico border.<sup>5</sup>

Students, frustrated at being told that a protest against the Bill at TUSD headquarters would be counter-productive, organised the run from Tucson to Phoenix. Hundreds of supporters met at 5 am in front of the TUSD headquarters, then walked across the city until reaching Joaquin Murrieta Park some five miles away. From there, about 50 students and community members took part in the run. As a faculty member at the University of Arizona, I joined the students on the run, many of whom had just graduated from high school and still others were continuing students at Raza Studies–TUSD. There were also community members of all ages and from all walks of life that took part in this historic run. While most of the runners were Mexican American, they were also joined by runners from the Yaqui and Akmiel O’otham Indigenous communities of Southern Arizona.<sup>i</sup> Those of us running were all conscious that this desert has claimed thousands of lives in their quest to come to *El Norte* or the United States. In part, what made this run somewhat bearable was the knowledge that we were not running alone, and that unlike those that die in the desert, for us, there were support vehicles, with plenty of food and water, shadowing our run.

### **Ceremonial running**

I’ve never been a runner and I’ve always hated running mindlessly around tracks. To me, it’s the epitome of running nowhere and I don’t like going nowhere, fast or slow. But today, after having participated in numerous ceremonial runs, I understand that running is not strictly a physical pursuit. It is something ancestral and spiritual and it is a means by which to learn, teach and acquire knowledge. It is also a way of knowing. With each footstep we take, we are not simply leaving footprints; we are also creating our own stories, our own narratives. More importantly, with our bodies, we create a collective narrative and carry within us a collective memory. Through collective running, we come to share experience, purpose and understanding, even raised consciousness regarding our own (besieged) community, but taking the further step of soliciting peoples’ ‘testimonios’ about why they/we run is also educational and enlightening. When they are shared, they become invaluable components of community knowledge.

The objective of this article is to explore the significance of running to the Mexican American community in Arizona and to understand how running is also part of a communal or collective way of learning, teaching and knowing and part of the creation of a collective or community consciousness.<sup>ii</sup> I posit that this cannot be done as an observer, at least not in a profound way. The impact of (ceremonial) running on the human body, mind and spirit and its effect on a community are not reproducible or comprehensible solely through books, movies or observation, or even through individual running. Therefore, I integrate my own introduction to the world of ceremonial running with my examination of how the runners perceive running and how learning and teaching take place at this time. What will be examined in this exploratory essay is the role of running as it relates to the Tucson community, a community that has been involved in intense human rights struggles over the past several years, including the battle against anti-Mexican, anti-immigrant and anti-Indigenous (racial profiling) legislation. It has also included the battle to defend the besieged Raza Studies department, which has been under attack precisely because of its Indigenous (Nahua-Maya) philosophical foundation. As a result, this community is also in a state of insurrection or, more appropriately, in a state of creation-resistance.<sup>iii</sup>

The running I examine here involves traditional ceremonial runs, including barrio runs, led by Tucson’s Calpolli Teoxicalli, a group of Nahua-based families who self-identify as Tlamanalca-Indigenous peoples of Tucson. They live by and ceremonially observe what is commonly referred to as the Aztec calendar.

This includes thirteen yearly barrio runs through Tucson streets designed to spiritually cleanse the city's Mexican/Mexican American barrios, most of which are situated on the Southside and Westside. While the Calpolli is relatively small, it has a great influence in Tucson, providing both education and a sense of spiritual support for this community under constant siege. There are several components to the Calpolli: Xinachtli or Nahuatl-based Indigenous education, danza (ceremonial Aztec-Mexican dancing), the Temezkal or the sweat lodge, a place for spiritual healing, and lastly, Neteotlaotiliztli or ceremonial running.

The ceremonial barrio runs in general are about the entire health of the community, which includes physical ailments or conditions such as alcoholism, drugs and violence, but also spiritual health. Each run is led by ceremonial staffs that have been carried at the front of the Peace and Dignity Journeys. The Peace and Dignity Journeys were initiated in 1992. They are run every four years as part of what is known as the Prophecy of the Eagle and the Condor, a prophecy that speaks to the Indigenous unity of the continent. They begin in Alaska and Chile and meet every four years at an agreed mid-point. While the 2009 run from Tucson to Phoenix was not an official Peace and Dignity Run, we ran with some of the Peace and Dignity staffs.<sup>iv</sup> Most of those who participated in the run to Phoenix are not members of the Calpolli and were not athletes or runners.<sup>v</sup>

Maria Molina Vai Sevoi Cihuacoatl is a member of Calpolli of Tlamanalco-Tucson, Arizona, and was one of the runners on this Tucson–Phoenix run. As a mother of six, she is an integral member of the Calpolli and participates in all aspects of the group. She came to be part of the Calpolli after previously living on the streets and a life of addictions. Today, she is completely drug and alcohol free. Here, she offers her comments on running:

Small and insignificant as we may seem in the vastness of the world, we are part of the journey of existence. Movement is the rule. We run to create harmony, find interconnectedness, and transcendence. We find harmony within and between our bodies, minds, and inner beings through respiration, rhythm, discipline, will, introspection, and vision. We do this individually and collectively. Interconnectedness comes from movement, repetition, physical and conscious evolution, history, memory, and vision. We link the past, present and future. Transcendence is leaping over mountains and reaching the sun, our vision. We run with purpose and obligation. The staff is the connection, the protection, the testament, and the archive (Molina 2011).

Sal Baldenegro is not a Calpolli member, but a community activist who takes part in the runs. He has been an integral fixture in the battles to defend Raza Studies. Here, he puts forth his views on why we run:<sup>vi</sup>

We run on our streets and under our sky, because we are the People of the Sun. We run to affirm our humanity and to celebrate our rich and beautiful culture that is woven into the very fabric of this land. We run for all the people of Arizona, because hate and fear do not define who we are. We run to honor our elders and our ancestors, whose blood courses through our veins, and whose spirits protect us and guide us in everything we do. We run because our identity cannot be taken from us, and our history will always live on. We run for the nanas and the tatas (grandparents), the primos and primas (cousins), and the tias and tios (aunts and uncles). We run to empower the people of our communities, and to let those in the shadows know that they do not have to live in fear, any longer. This is why we run (Baldenegro 2011).

For Baldenegro, why we run is integrated into identity and why we protest. He also conveys the sense that it is inherited and that it is not an individual, but a community endeavour involving the inter-generational transmission of knowledge and responsibility.

The idea that we are not defined by hate and fear is key: our runs are not reactive, but affirming, and people of all cultures take part in them.

### **The Tucson to Phoenix run**

*As I'm running through the desert, every single stride I take is difficult. My legs are in pain, the heat is sweltering and the sun is beating down hard. Here, there is no shade and my heart is pounding. My two running partners are young sisters that run like gazelles. There are approximately thirteen teams of runners. We run a mile and then wait our turn inside a large van or one of the other support vehicles. The wait seems like minutes in this brutal and suffocating heat. I have this choking sensation as a result of medication, but also, I am drinking chia, a seed with ancient roots on this continent that boosts one's energy.<sup>vii</sup> My breathing feels constricted. It feels like I am inhaling fire, but that does not deter me; I run, like everyone runs, under the blazing sun. This is the first time I am running in 25 years.<sup>viii</sup>*

The only runners in the group with actual running experience were members of the Calpolli. The rest of us looked like we had just gotten up from our couches. Most of the runners were from Tucson's Raza Studies programs. Some were K-12 students, whereas others were alumni from the program. Most of the teachers and directors of the Raza Studies department ran. Elders guided the run, including the initiators of the Peace and Dignity Journeys, Gustavo Gutierrez and Tupac Enrique Acosta of Tonatierra, Phoenix. When we arrived in Phoenix after two days under the blistering Arizona sun, we were greeted ceremoniously at Tonatierra or the Nahuacalli, the Indigenous Peoples Embassy, established as a result of the First Continental Encounter of Indigenous Nations, Peoples and Organizations in Quito, Ecuador in 1992.

Two years after the 2009 run, Jacob Robles, a Raza Studies alumni, spoke about the impact that the run had had on his life. Robles, a graffiti artist, was and continues to be a member of the Social Justice Education Project (SJEP), a component of Raza Studies. It consists primarily of Raza Studies alumni. It was they who called for the Tucson–Phoenix run and those that initially defended the department, beginning in 2006, when the first public attacks were launched by Arizona superintendent, Mr. Horne. Robles explains:

I was first introduced to running as something spiritual when I participated in the ceremonial run from Tucson to Phoenix as a protest to S.B. 1069, the second Bill that attempted to ban Ethnic Studies from Arizona's public schools. I learned some of the philosophies and perspectives that Indigenous people of the Americas have about the act of running. One of the symbolic meanings running represents is the offering of your body and energy to the Earth. With each step you are honoring the relationship you share with the Earth, as you demonstrate a very significant bond with the land, which modern science knows as gravity. I, not being much of an athlete at all, very much had to push my body to its limits and then some (Robles 2011).

This run was initiated by youths who had little experience with running. Therefore, on the run, they learned much, particularly about themselves. Robles continues:

The experience as a whole had a significant effect on me. Still to this day, it is very difficult to sum up in words. It all changed when I realised that us running was more of a prayer and an offering than a protest. It was almost like an exchange and a demonstration to the Earth and all the life-giving energies, that we will put our bodies and our very survival on the line for something bigger. Having a chance to experience these philosophies and get a tiny taste of the understandings of running, it has become something which I see essential in my own spiritual well being. Since then I have participated in many more ceremonial runs and other Indigenous ceremonies in general.

Another important part of it is it reconnects me to those lost traditions and understandings our people used to know and pass on. It's another healthy way of decolonizing our minds, bodies and spirits. When I run on any occasion now, I think of these things and I always feel like I'm running for things beyond myself (Robles 2011).<sup>ix</sup>

What Robles says is not atypical of the youths who took part in this run; their insights are very revealing of what they observed and what they learned. When we reached Akimel O'odham territory southeast of Phoenix, we were met by serious runners from the O'odham nation. They joined us and shared with us their philosophy of running. Most of the runners were older and they shared with us that the young had not yet taken up the tradition of ceremonial running. They ran the expanse of their territory, with a few of our runners joining them part of the way.

After leaving the O'odham nation, we were joined by Yaqui runners once we reached the village of Guadalupe outside of Phoenix; most of the runners from there finished the run, which was perhaps another fifteen miles. On the third day, we were joined by hundreds of supporters while we walked to the state capital. As we gathered in a circle, we learned that Senator Paton, the author of the Bill, was dropping the legislation that day. However, he vowed that he and his allies would kill Raza Studies the following year. We celebrated, but not before one of the runners had several epileptic seizures and a number of the runners succumbed to heatstroke. One of my students, Michelle Rascon, collapsed while reading a poem. It felt hotter in Phoenix than it did in the desert. These things that happened were simply part of the process of running, praying, purifying, and sacrificing for our communities.

Since that run, I have joined the Calpolli in their barrio runs. Aside from those runs, I have helped to initiate, in collaboration with the Calpolli and other community members, other runs to combat obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, domestic violence and numerous runs in defense of Raza Studies.<sup>x</sup> In effect, these runs function as prayer and as collective purification rituals. The barrio runs in Tucson are not competitive and they are not races; the slowest runner sets the pace. When I started to run, I was setting the pace. Most barrio runs are six to seven miles or more. There are other ceremonial runs, tied to the Aztec/Mexica Calendar, that are often much longer, but those we usually run in relays.<sup>xi</sup>

Running through the barrios gives us a sense of pride; we are always running to purify our barrios, we often run not against someone, but for ourselves, for our friends and for our families. We test our own strength and stamina. Many times, we wanted to quit but the run is a prayer and if we are running for others, to quit would mean not believing in why we are running. To quit would mean not completing the purification.

Pricila Rodriguez, a former Tucson High School student now at the University of Arizona explained that she didn't really have words to express what she experienced on the desert run: 'I spoke with my feet'. It wasn't just Rodriguez who answered in this manner; the run was so breathtaking and humbling that it was difficult for many of the students to explain what it meant to run through the desert. Perhaps all their beliefs, all that they had learned in their Raza Studies classes were tested in the desert. Rodriguez (2011), who is featured in the *Precious Knowledge* documentary that chronicles the struggle to save Raza Studies further explained: 'It was as if my ancestors (Tarahumara) were running through me'. The Tarahumara or Raramuri, from the state of Chihuahua, are known worldwide for their endurance running, for running not simply marathons, but ultra-marathons (100-mile runs).

### **Corriendo educando or teaching/learning while running**

Prior to running to Phoenix, I never actually thought about running having significance greater than its physical component. The Peace and Dignity Journeys are the exception.

The journeys are spiritual runs with many ceremonies and much organisation and coordination involved at every stop. These runs proclaim the Indigeneity and unity of the continent; Pacha Mama (Quechua), Abya Yalla (Cuna) or Cemanahuak (Nahuatl). It is a message proclaimed by Maya scholar, Domingo Martinez Paredez in his foundational book, *Un Continente y Una Cultura (One Continent and One Culture)* (1960).

The dynamic, for me, is a healthy tension in regards to where I personally fit within these movements and these messages. I have my own identity: *macehual*—hombre de maiz (common man, made of maize). In Mexico, I most likely would be identified by the government as a *mestizo* (racially mixed) or, per Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1995), as a de-Indigenised Indigenous man. In *Mexico Profundo*, Bonfil Batalla argues that despite colonisation, Mexico at its core remains Indigenous and most its peoples are Indigenous, albeit, de-Indigenised. In this country, I am often categorised as Mexican or Mexican American. So who decides? The late American Indian scholar Jack Forbes (1973) long-positied that the whole world is mestizo so, in effect, it is a useless category. The dynamic is not personal; it is a social phenomenon affecting tens of millions or more on this continent. What I allude to is not so much about identity, but about one's role in relationship to these movements. My particular concern is about de-Indigenised peoples who live in the United States, many of whom, due to their Western education, have been severed from their ancestral knowledge. Most are of Mexican or Central American origin. This is the context for my work on running as a means of learning.

There is a body of work in regards to (ceremonial) running among Indigenous peoples, but not a lot has been written by or about de-Indigenised peoples.<sup>xii</sup> In *Indian Running* (1981), Peter Nabokov provided an anthropological view on the topic of running and Indigenous peoples in the Americas, more precisely, the United States Southwest. Most anthropological literature on running concentrates on one people, such as the Rarámuri (Tarahumara), the Mexica or the Inca runners from South America. Nabokov concentrated on the fourth centennial or commemoration of the 1680 Pueblo revolt in the Southwest. The Pueblo Revolt is considered the first great Indigenous revolt in what is today the United States (Sando and Agoyo 2005). Running was an integral, if not the most significant, component of the planning for the revolt. The 1680 plan hatched by the Pueblos relied on runners using knotted strings to coordinate the beginning of the revolt. This involved primarily the Indigenous pueblos of New Mexico and the Hopi of Arizona, but also other allies. Despite the plot being discovered because two of the runners were intercepted, tortured and killed, the revolt succeeded in driving out Spaniards for at least twelve years until 1692. It was so significant that it continues to be etched in the psyche of these Pueblos and the Hopi, and running continues to be generally associated with that great revolt.

The revolt does not register in the same way for many peoples of Mexican descent who live in the United States because it was not a part of their experience. The exception includes people considered Hispanos who indeed have roots in the Southwest going back to the 1500s and 1600s. Many are actually mixed with Indigenous peoples of North America: Pueblos, Navajos, Hopis, Apaches, etc. Though mixed, most are Hispanicised to the point that many publicly identify only with their Spanish roots, and often deny their Indigeneity. However, for those from this region who identify as Chicano, this term itself is an acknowledgement of Indigenous/mestizo roots.

Literature on Indigenous peoples, including on the topic of running, generally does not include Mexicans/Chicanos in the United States. In *Spirit of the Game* (2005), Greg Cajete writes primarily about Indigenous peoples from the north, but does integrate Mesoamerican Indigenous knowledge from the south. Despite this, writing on the topic of teaching/learning via running with a focus on Mexicans/Chicanos is completely uncharted territory. The running described in this article points to motion and movement, running as a place or a method

whereby ancient (Nahuatl-Maya) knowledge can be retrieved by de-Indigenised peoples. Because ceremonial running is generally collective, what is activated for this community is not simply knowledge but ways of being, ways of living and ways of relating to each other; hence, it is transforming the larger community, especially within the context of the defence of Raza Studies.

### Running/writing protocols

The running I'm writing about here is led primarily by Calpolli Teoxicalli so, to write this, I sought permission from them. Part of my agreement is that I will not write about specifics related to the ceremonial rituals associated with the running. Truthfully, I never have and never plan to write about any kind of ceremony as that is part of my own (research) ethic. My interest here is to examine how running constitutes a means by which to learn/teach and acquire knowledge. I became interested in this topic when I invited members of my class at the University of Arizona to join me on one of the runs. This was the April 2011 run to raise cancer awareness in memory of Consuelo Aguilar.<sup>xiii</sup> This, however, was not the first run associated with my classes. In the spring of 2010, I taught a class on cultural nutrition and embedded into the curriculum was a run to raise consciousness on obesity, diabetes and heart disease. This run was powerful, connected to a highly successful conference in the community. Despite this, I had not viewed the run, in and of itself, as something connected to learning/teaching through running. In preparation for the cancer run, I asked friends, students and members of the Calpolli to write me thoughts about what running means to them. I present their thoughts here.

### Testimonios

The *testimonio*, as a means to tell stories, is closely associated with Latin America, torture, repression and trauma.<sup>xiv</sup> I have not necessarily elicited the testimonios of peoples who have suffered trauma. Instead, I have elicited the views of those who run, their reasons for participating in the special Calpolli runs, and how they feel about running through Tucson's barrios. Many runners indicated they were running for themselves or for those around them. If a generalisation can be made, it is that these runners run either to heal themselves (spiritual purification) or to offer silent prayers for those around them. As opposed to kneeling, these are prayers that involve motion and movement.

This section begins with thoughts from Jose and Norma Gonzalez of Calopolli Teoxicalli.

Our ancestors knew the beauty of having an intimate relationship with our Earth while they ran upon her. Thankfully they left us this way of knowing: *Neteotlaotiliztli*.<sup>1</sup> Today we run to initiate healing (Gonzalez and Gonzalez 2011).

Here, Gonzalez and Gonzalez present us with their further thoughts on the meaning of ceremonial running:

Ceremonial running allows us to utilise our physical body in such a way as to create positive energy by way of our positive thoughts and loving intentions. As such, with every step that we leave behind we are also leaving behind positive energy, beautiful thoughts, and intentions of love. This requires a physical sacrifice as sweat is being generated thus challenging our comfort in a way that allows us to gain humility. It is within this humility that we can find the *voluntad* (will) to run for others and focus our thoughts and intentions towards someone in hopes of generating and transmitting healing energy and love to those who are in need. The constant movement reminds us of life and how life requires constant movement (Gonzalez and Gonzalez 2011)

The issue of sacrifice is important here.<sup>xv</sup> When we run, our bodies experience pain, particularly if we engage in long runs that require many days of recovery. We willingly do this for the benefit of others, for the benefit of entire communities.

As Norma Gonzalez explained, running often results in meditation and even revelations. Runners will speak about thoughts clarifying while they run. Molina and the Gonzalezes are members of the Calpolli. They all took part in the Tucson to Phoenix run. Robles is not Calpolli and neither is Lorena Howard, yet their thoughts are just as enlightened. In collaboration with Howard, the Calpolli led a domestic violence run/walk in 2010. Here are Howard's thoughts on the purpose of running/walking:

Walking started out to be something unwelcomed, but is now starting to become part of my routine and I have noticed it is helping me physically, emotionally and spiritually. I pray, plan my day, think of my family, friends and I dream. Historically running has been a way to bring cleansing and purification. This is needed in our state [Arizona]. To fight for social justice we have to be healthy, strong and focused so we can find balance and harmony. We need to become centered, to regain our sense of balance and power. Running is part of my culture, my people. The Tarahumara run not for speed but for endurance. I meditate on that. This for me is a Spiritual run, to bring Peace, Dignity and Justice and focus to our journey (Howard, 2011).

Because the barrio runs had not generally had a specific purpose, it was decided that we needed to ask permission from the Calpolli to have this kind of a run. The evening that permission was requested intentionally coincided with a community Tlahtocan or community gathering at the Aztlan Boxing gym in the City of South Tucson. That site was chosen because the Calpolli regularly provides community education or danza to those who work out there. Also, a good portion of the barrio runners train at the gym. Perhaps about 100 community members were present that evening; when Howard sought permission, it was done so in front of everyone there. Without hesitation, both the Calpolli members and the boxing club community accepted.<sup>xvi</sup>

For Tucson, these special runs have been historic in part because in the United States, most health runs/walks sidestep communities of colour. Of all the walks/runs in the past several years, the 2010 thirteen-mile walk from the East Side to the West Side may have been the most notable, primarily because it was organised by high school students for the purpose of defending Ethnic Studies. While people of all walks of life participated, the majority were high school students. In one sense, the walk was more arduous than the runs, which normally last about three hours. The walk lasted about eight hours. Ashley Bustamante, a Tucson High School senior at the time, commented about her participation in this walk/run:

I decided to march on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010. A 13-mile walk, I knew it wasn't something easy, but I knew it was worth it. As I walked I noticed how powerful this was, how just walking with many people fighting for the same right (education) was changing lives with each step that we took. We were making history, walking or running for an important reason helps the body and the soul, you no longer feel like a human, or skin and bones, you feel like something bigger, like if you went out of your body and floated out in your soul. It's an amazing connection... (Bustamante, 2011).

For a community that had already witnessed countless protests, this walk made quite an impression precisely because these students walked the expanse of the city under a hot blazing sun of their own volition. The organisers, including Bustamante, were members of Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA or Chicana/Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan),<sup>xvii</sup> a nationwide Chicano student activist organisation founded in 1970.



These students have also been instrumental in the subsequent battles to defend Ethnic Studies. In one sense, each individual finds his/her own meaning to the runs (or walks) but all of them contribute to a consciousness of the need to strengthen the spirit of the community while battling hostile forces.

In December 2010, another run was held to defend Ethnic Studies. On most barrio runs, the Calpolli can count on ten to twenty runners. On this run, about 80 runners showed up. This included runners from throughout Tlamanalca-Tucson, Arizona, California and from many other parts of the country. There were Hopi, Yaqui, Apache and Diné (Navajo) runners. And there were several dozen Indigenous runners from the south: Rarámuri (Taraumara), Huichol, Mexica and Maya runners from Chiapas. That run, from A Mountain to El Rio Community Center, snaked through Tucson's barrios. We ran in front of the state building, the site of many pro-Ethnic Studies rallies; in front of the federal building, home of Operation Streamline; and the TUSD headquarters, the site of many protests to defend Ethnic Studies.<sup>xviii</sup>

Each run becomes seemingly more special than the one before. The 3 April 2011 run for Consuelo Aguilar is an example of this. Aguilar mirrored the struggle in Arizona, particularly to defend Ethnic Studies. She contracted an extremely aggressive form of cancer in the summer of 2008 and within months, she was taken to spirit world. Aguilar had majored in Mexican American Studies in both her undergraduate and graduate studies. Additionally, she was an advisor to high school MEChAs and worked at Raza Studies-TUSD, until she passed away prematurely.

Norma Gonzalez commented about running in relationship to Aguilar. These thoughts were in preparation for the cancer awareness walk/run that drew more than 200 runners/walkers:

I have had the honor of running with Consuelo recently as my thoughts were particularly focused on her during a barrio run. I was running with the Cihuacoatl, our [women's] ceremonial staff that contains her energy. It was a moment of reconciliation for she and I. During that time she expressed to me to find my strength to run strong and with fuerza (strength) and voluntad (will). I could feel her embrace and her willingness to help me through a particularly tough run (Gonzalez, N. 2011).

Why we run and running, in effect, become the same thing. The run for Aguilar was intended to bring about cancer awareness, yet it was much bigger than that. Andrea Romero, professor of psychology at the University of Arizona, offers her view:

... as we neared the final turn I could see the ceremonial runners coming down the opposite side of the mall, when I felt her presence. I felt it in the energy of the runners, as they moved as a collective, running two by two in a group moving collectively and with purpose. I could feel the intention of their movement in her spirit. I almost stopped and just watched the hummingbird movements of the group, fast yet slow as their feet hit the ground, each movement they made a visual prayer, a reminder, and a future intention to guide and mentor each future Mexican American Studies student... (Romero 2011)

Running together for a similar purpose creates a powerful sense of community; at the very minimum, it is a transformative experience. Jessica Mejia, a former co-chair of University of Arizona MEChA and a recent UA graduate, who has run with us the past two years, describes this process:

I run because I can feel my positive energy leave my body and go to the person or people that I am thinking of. I can feel my heat and energy leave and I feel love replenish my offering. When I run I can feel all of the runners' heartbeats as one. Running is a way to

think about the world around us without any distractions. We can sometimes find solutions, it's a type of prayer and it just gives all of us a sense of unity (Mejia 2011).

In effect, this is what happens on every run. She has indicated to me that when she runs alone, she has trouble running one mile, but that during ceremonial runs, she can easily run the six to seven miles. Tiffany Mendibles Escobar, a recent graduate at the University of Arizona, and also a co-chair of MEChA there, explains a similar process:

The ceremonial run behind the staffs is not aimed for conditioning our bodies, but rather it is aimed at conditioning our spirits. Every time our feet make contact with the earth, we are sending the energies from our body into the earth and the earth is sending her energies back into our bodies ... Running is a prayer, with our feet we are asking to create changes in the energies that are impacting people within our community (Mendibles Escobar 2011).

### **Synopsis of learning/teaching while running**

Much of what is learned when we run is a combination of things that we touch, see, hear, smell and observe, and what our bodies and minds absorb. For some, running is akin to a dream state; often, it will be days before we will remember that we ran into someone, or that we came across something, such as a new mural, or a series of boarded up homes, due to foreclosures or deportations, or the many barrio dogs. Most of what we learn takes place while we are running; we learn about our own bodies and we learn a little about those in our midst. We learn from each other and we learn from those who observe us running with our staffs; because we are not racing, we are often asked why we are running. We briefly respond, informing them of the cause for the runs.<sup>xix</sup>

After a ceremonial run, the participants gather in a (listening) circle and whether it is a dozen or 80 runners, we go around one by one and speak. We speak about the run, or about what's on our mind. No one interrupts anyone. Whether the run is about diabetes, domestic violence or Ethnic Studies, people speak of their relationship to the topic. Other times, people simply speak about the barrio we ran through. In addition to the observation and exchanges that take place during the runs, what is being transmitted at this time is both knowledge and collective memory (of the barrio residents) that go back many generations and an acknowledgement of the Indigenous peoples of the region. In some cases, people simply speak about how their bodies feel, about how they feel after running through Tucson's barrios. After not running for months or years, people often share their stories about what ails their bodies and why that did not stop them from running. More often than not, it is running for others that wills them to continue.

The runs usually include runners ranging from elementary schoolchildren to elders. Often, wisdom streams forth just as much from children as from elders. In the circle, generally, we only speak once, but the rest of the time, we listen and learn from each other, respectfully. What people say after running is usually spontaneous and some people can't even speak because what we have experienced cannot be contained or simply conveyed in words: the experience is mind, body and spirit, and more than communal, it is spiritual. It can be called educational in that much is being learned in this process; much knowledge is being acquired and much teaching is also taking place. More than the transmission of knowledge, it is also during this process when and where bonds are created and solidified among the runners.

### **Future research**

The runs we have created in our community were not done with research in mind. They have been created because these issues need to be raised and addressed and our communities need to be cleansed (from the hate that is hurled our way).

In the future, researchers may want to know if these runs have had any effect, to see if in fact our communities have become healthier. They would be welcome to examine such correlations. Others may even be interested in measuring what is being learned. In this exploratory article, I conversed primarily with runners who joined the special runs led by the Calpolli. Future research should include interviews of barrio residents to see if there is an effect on the residents themselves. The challenge will be to see the role that these runs may have had in the transformative process, in a community that has been in a state of insurrection. This insurrection has included many scores of protests, marches and rallies, especially in defense of Raza Studies. It is a community that is arguably in rebellion and unafraid, but also a community whose runs constitute the creation part of the creation-resistance culture that has emerged here the past several years.

## Conclusion

I would like to end with the words of a friend, Joanna Mixpe Ley. She is a teacher at Semillas School in Los Angeles, a school operated under Nahuatl Indigenous principles, language and philosophy. She is also a runner and joined us on the December 2010 run in Tucson to defend Ethnic Studies. On several occasions, she has run with us in Los Angeles while we were running in Tucson:

Running thrust itself from an unwanted. It was torturous to run, in the heat, in cold air, in the rain, on tracks, like living a rat race. No rational reason could convince me otherwise. Soon I realised, it is much like prayer. When one prays, reflects, there is intention, meditation, and discipline. It is a form of healing transcending the self. Once my foot intentionally hit the ground again, I took in the clouds, sun, moon, the trees, the air, the four legged, and all my relations became my 'zone', especially those times when I knew that as I run, others are running in Arizona to resist in existence. *Para todos todo, para nosotros nada* (For everyone, everything, for us, nothing).

In Tucson, in Arizona, we run for our very existence. When we ran to Phoenix in 2009, we all called it 'Running for Our Lives'. While death was all around us in the desert, we were not speaking of things physical. We ran so that we could maintain our culture, history, identity, language and education—rights that we are born with and rights that are guaranteed by virtually every human rights treaty or convention since the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We did that, but we also ran to preserve our stories and our memories, that which constitutes who we are.

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<sup>i</sup> While the program that has been directly targeted has been Raza or Mexican American Studies, Yaqui and O'otham students have both been part of the program, but also, have defended the program.

<sup>ii</sup> This community in Arizona has long been treated as foreign and alien, and today, it is also treated as illegal.

<sup>iii</sup> Creation-resistance is the idea that a people in political struggle must be able to balance the concepts of resistance and creation.

<sup>iv</sup> I was present, as a journalist/columnist, when the runners arrived in Teotihuacan, Mexico in 1992. In 2012, the runners will begin the run in March and arrive in Tikal, Guatemala in November.

<sup>v</sup> While I am not a member of Calpolli Teoxicalli, I fully participate in their barrio/ceremonial runs.

<sup>vi</sup> While Sal Baldenegro Jr. is an activist in his own right, he inherits the name of his father who is seen by many in Tucson as one of the original activists of the 1960s–1970s Chicano Movement, a civil rights movement that fought for the civil and human rights of Chicanos/Chicanas during that earlier generation. Baldenegro Jr. is a documentarian (of the Chicano Movement) and is currently running for elected office.

<sup>vii</sup> In the ancient creation story found in The Legend of the Suns, found in the sixteenth century Codice Chimalpopoca (Velasquez 1945), of how maize came to the people, chia, along with beans, squash and corn, was one of the seeds inside Tonalcapetl or the Mountain of Sustenance.

<sup>viii</sup> At the end of 1985, I was running daily, to become strong, in preparation for a police brutality trial in Los Angeles at which time I triumphed.

<sup>ix</sup> When many Mexican or Chicanos/Chicanas speak of a longing, of a need or want, to return to their Indigenous roots, many speak in what academics refer to 'essentialising' terms. The reason this occurs is because many Mexicans/Chicanos/Chicanas are by phenotype Indigenous, yet many if not most are de-Indigenised, as a result of centuries of colonisation. This desire to connect or reconnect to Indigenous roots often is done, without the knowledge of what specific lineage many belong to. By default, many choose to follow Nahua-Maya traditions that many elders from Mexico pass on in their visits to the United States.

<sup>x</sup> Other special, personal/community runs included a run to honour my father, a man with but a third grade education, whose life stories were instrumental to my completing a PhD, and a run commemorating my victorious 1979 criminal trial.

<sup>xi</sup> I don't run between the barrio or ceremonial runs. I don't run for the purpose of exercise, but I do believe this will change.

<sup>xii</sup> A number of the runners in the Peace and Dignity Journeys have been Chicanos, many of whom are either Indigenous or would be considered 'de-Indigenised Indigenous' persons.

<sup>xiii</sup> Consuelo Aguilar was a graduate of Mexican American Studies at the University of Arizona, receiving both her Bachelor and Master degrees there. She died at 26 years old while working for the embattled Raza Studies Department-TUSD.

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<sup>xiv</sup> Latina scholars also have embraced *testimonio* as an appropriate method by which to tell the stories of Latinas in the United States (The Latina Feminist Group 2001).

<sup>xv</sup> For a treatise on human sacrifice, see *City of Sacrifice* (Carrasco 1999) and *Al Otro Lado de las Sombras* (Meza Gutierrez 2004).

<sup>xvi</sup> It is possible that in the future, barrio runs will be held for the purposes of raising both awareness and funds.

<sup>xvii</sup> Aztlan was the purported homeland of the Aztec/Mexica peoples, reputed to have been located somewhere in what is today the United States' Southwest.

<sup>xviii</sup> Under the federal program known as Operation Streamline, each day, approximately seventy Mexican migrant men (and often several detainees from Central America and a few women) are hauled before a judge. Each detainee is chained from their wrists, waist and ankles. The proceeding lasts one hour during which time they are charged, tried, convicted and sentenced to a private prison for the act of entering the country without documentation. The speed of the 'trials' and the rushed nature of the proceedings makes a mockery of the concept of justice. This is why many human rights activists have long protested this operation.

<sup>xix</sup> When the barrio runs began, it was the practice to walk the route of the runs through the barrios, and leave flyers in all the homes, explaining the purpose of the runs. Because it is time-consuming, this practice has been discontinued, although the practice may return so that neighbours can get a better idea of why the runs are held.