

Evoking the Shadow Beast: Disability and Chicano Advocacy in San Antonio's Donkey Lady Folktale

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A city ripe with cultural folklore, San Antonio, Texas is a site for many popular tales of the ghostly and otherwise unexplained. From variations of La Llorona, the woman who wails for her lost children, to recitations of The Dancing Devil, a skilled dancer who transforms into the very face of evil, and a tale of ghostly children pushing cars over the famed Ghost Tracks, San Antonio offers a plethora of folktales that have been the subject of much research within the ethnographic and folklore community. In general, studies concerned with these folkloric imaginaries have read these legends as either suggestive of sociocultural regulation or ingresses through which the San Antonio community connects to events of the past. In the case of La Llorona, the weeping woman, Barbara Simerka explores how stories of the female specter are meant to regulate children's behavior and warn against cultural improprieties (2000:50). Similarly, José Limón describes how Fordism, and modernity more generally, creates turmoil between generations, coinciding with surges in the dissemination of The Dancing Devil folklore (1994:172). Both Carl Lindahl (2005) and Cathryn Merla-Watson (2011) explore the ostensive, or healing, connection that San Antonians feel while having their cars seemingly pushed over the Ghost Tracks by juvenile specters of the children said to haunt the area. While Lindahl explains the terror and reverence felt by those who visit the Ghost Tracks and take part in the legend (2005:164), Merla-Watson describes how the act of visiting the tracks ostensibly connects visitors to the history of labor associated with the area (2011:58).

Although San Antonio's iconic folktales have been the subject of much research and debate amongst the ethnographic and folklore community, one exceedingly influential folkloric icon, San Antonio's Donkey Lady, has been virtually unrecognized in the academic discourse concerning San Antonio legends. The tale, itself, recounts the

events leading up to a violent attack on a spinster woman and her lone donkey, the incident leaving the woman hideously disfigured with the appearance of the donkey she loved and cared for. The narrative continues to inspire scores from San Antonio's Mexican-American community to seek out the Donkey Lady at the bridge where it is believed she has remained since the attack. The Donkey Lady folktale complicates current understandings of Chicana/o, and more specifically San Antonio, folklore as either a means of social control or a form of ostensive healing. Through the lens of spectral studies, it is possible to theorize both the Donkey Lady folktale and the act of visiting Donkey Lady Bridge in order to understand how the Donkey Lady narrative engages with questions concerning the intersection of queerness, disability, and race.

Concerned with the politics of haunting, spectral studies seeks to explain the social injustices and traumas associated with the appearance of ghosts and specters. As sociologist and foremost scholar on the ghostly Avery Gordon points out in her formative text *Ghostly Matters*, haunting is "one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with" (2008:xvi). According to Gordon, haunting refers to "those singular and yet repetitive instances when...the over and done with comes alive, when what's in your blind field comes into view" (2011:2). Haunting, then, is the ingress of the past into the present, the vehicle that allows social injustices such as trauma, exploitation, or hegemonic oppression to return to the forefront of thought, demanding attention. In contrast to popular views on haunting, these supernatural appearances are not about playful invisibility or an act of ghoulish trickery; instead haunting immerses us in those histories that are hidden just beyond our periphery. For the purposes of this analysis, the peripheral histories illuminated by haunting are those that reveal not just past, but present instances relating to the subjugation of racial, ethnic, or minority groups. Scholar and author Kathleen Brogan highlights the saliency of this point in suggesting that the deep connection between the offenses of the past, namely oppressive acts against marginalized groups, and the current conflicts stemming from similar issues prove to be the decisive factor in recurrent cultural hauntings within literature and folklore (1998:130).¹ Thus, specters and ghosts manifest when "the trouble they represent and symbolize is no longer being contained, repressed, or blocked from view," demanding attention and haunting ceaselessly until the historical tribulations they represent are acknowledged and rectified in the present (Gordon 2001:2).

More than a question of what is simply real or imagined, supernatural specters raise queries regarding the social and historical offenses of the past, challenging master narratives and complicating linear representations of time. When applied to the cultural production of storytelling and folklore, the spectral may take on the shape of cultural imaginaries, folkloric characters that are not necessarily ghosts, but perform the act of haunting just the same. The Donkey Lady presents an idiomatic example of a cultural imaginary as it relates to sociohistorical epistemologies and the politics of haunting. In my analysis of one of San Antonio's most popular folktales, I propose that the Donkey Lady narrative engages with issues of queerness to illustrate a broad history of prejudice, injustice, and violence against those who are non-normative. Furthermore, the act of visiting Donkey Lady Bridge exemplifies the complex relationship between disability and race by suggesting that the Donkey Lady's disfigurement reaffirms sociohistorical notions of attraction to and exploitation of disability, while also hinting at a possible linkage between the Donkey Lady and the Chicana/o community that persistently transmits her folktale.

The Donkey Lady Folklore

Though I have grown up knowing and communicating a specific version of the Donkey Lady legend, numerous accounts of the elusive donkey-esque woman exist. These varying accounts, transmitted almost entirely through oral storytelling (with some appearing on online folklore message boards), include descriptions of the Donkey Lady as a seven-foot tall Chinese woman and a grieving widow and mother gone insane. And while each variation of the narrative offers multiple interpretations, I will focus on what is perhaps the most popular and pertinent version of the story entailing:

A lady whose house, which was near a bridge over a small creek, was burned. She was a recluse and was asleep when the fire began. She herself was severely burned: fingers and toes fused together to appear hoof-like, and face so disfigured and sagging as to appear similar to that of a donkey or horse. She is also said to have fallen while running from the blazing house, the bones of her hands and feet so burnt and brittle that they broke, leaving stumps as limbs. Afterwards, it is said, she went completely insane, lived under the bridge and roamed the woods on the south side of San Antonio. (Range 2011)

Perhaps most important in this account of the narrative is the reason for which her house is set ablaze. As I understand it, the woman now

known as the Donkey Lady was a spinster who lived alone save for one donkey. This donkey was not used for labor, nor was he a source of income for the woman; contrariwise, the woman cared for the donkey as though it were her own child, enjoying the donkey's companionship over that of the surrounding community. Legend has it that on an unknown date some of the children from the community that the woman lived in began goading both the woman and her donkey, presumably mocking them for being outsiders within the neighborhood. Provoked by the taunts of the children, the donkey lashes out at the children, biting one of them in a harsh manner. Later that evening, the men of the community learn about the donkey's attack and confront the woman about the incident, rebuking her for caring for the donkey in such a way and allowing it to bite and, presumably, injure a child. When the woman does nothing to rectify the situation, essentially justifying the child's injury as punishment for tormenting both the donkey and herself, the men become angry and subsequently set fire to woman's home in the dead of night. In escaping the fire the woman suffered the horribly disfiguring injuries that, as described above, caused her appearance to transform from humanistic to animalistic as she became the fabled Donkey Lady.

It is worth noting that in each variation of the folktale the woman who later becomes known as the Donkey Lady is never named, but instead remains a mysterious, ambiguous character. Similarly, in nearly all of the narrative variations the woman is not given the distinction of Donkey Lady until she becomes disfigured. What is also interesting about this folktale is that much ambiguity surrounds the time at which these events are believed to have taken place. Oral accounts of the story place the Donkey Lady in San Antonio as early as 1900 and as late as the 1950s, yet no definitive conclusion has been reached concerning either the date of the events or the onset of the folktale's oral tradition. This ambiguity, however, has not put a damper on the popularity of the folktale as scores of San Antonians widely circulate their version of the tale year-round, sparking much debate as to which narrative variation is the most authentic to San Antonio. This fascination with the authenticity of the tale can be seen as a contributing factor in San Antonio's persistent curiosity with the location known as Donkey Lady Bridge.

Legend-Trip to Donkey Lady Bridge

The legend of the Donkey Lady is not limited to the folktale itself as many San Antonians who become familiarized with the tale find themselves making the pilgrimage to Donkey Lady Bridge. Located on the south side of San Antonio, Donkey Lady Bridge lies within a

sparingly populated area. Accessible through a small street labeled Jett Road, the bridge is surrounded by lush vegetation, hovering over a diminutive body of water known as Elm Creek. Though the area was originally cut off from visitation and blocked off to prevent unwanted visitors from coming dangerously close to the creek at night, it has since become part of a high use greenway trail, opening the bridge to an increase in visitation and an unprecedented accessibility. However, the previous lack of accessibility to Donkey Lady Bridge was never enough to keep locals from legend-tripping, the act of journeying to the site of a folk narrative or legend, to the infamous bridge. With a sparse few in their forties and fifties only vaguely familiar with the Legend of the Donkey Lady, the majority of those who venture to the bridge are from younger generations. Searching for a quick, late night thrill, or perhaps drawn by sheer curiosity, droves of San Antonians frequent Donkey Lady Bridge, not only around Halloween, but year round seeking out the fabled creature-like woman hoping to catch a glimpse of her glowing yellow eyes. As one local newspaper states:

According to the legend, if you drive to the one-lane bridge at night...turn off your engine and begin honking [to coax the Donkey Lady out of hiding], several things could and sometimes do happen. They include hearing the heehaw of a donkey or a human imitating the sounds, or feeling the back of the vehicle dip suddenly and later finding donkey hoof prints on the vehicle. Over the years, numerous people have taken the Donkey Lady Bridge dare and had scary experiences. (*San Antonio Express-News* 2006)

Reports of confrontations with the Donkey Lady range from shock and terror as to the legitimacy of the tale, to reaffirmations of the narrative's folk status. And although many have attempted what is known as the Donkey Lady Bridge challenge, the curiosity surrounding what is quickly becoming San Antonio's most popular cultural imaginary never seems to diminish. Some may question the cause of San Antonio's utter fascination with this fabled donkey woman, wondering if there could be more to the dissemination of the tale than the thrill of scaring young children or an attempt to quash adolescent boredom. More than a strange tale of a woman turned hideous beast, the Donkey Lady folktale holds significance beyond its status as merely a form of frightening entertainment. In theorizing the Donkey Lady folklore, a greater understanding of the intersections of queerness, disability, and race that lie just below the tale's surface can be acquired, thereby exposing a history of social injustice deeply rooted in the cultural haunting of the Donkey Lady.

Theorizing the Folktale

To begin theorizing the Donkey Lady in terms of queerness, disability, and race, it is imperative to understand how the immediate causes for her disfigurement are connected to broader sociopolitical issues of normativity. Concerned with “the politics of representation, focusing on creating knowledge about the histories, activism, and cultures of a people who have been designated as ‘other,’” disability studies works to theorize the disabled not in terms of capabilities, but instead brings attention to the ways in which social environments favor those who are “normatively constituted” (James and Wu 2006:3). In their article “Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Literature: Intersections and Interventions” Jennifer James and Cynthia Wu explain how “disability as a label...generates institutionalized exclusion” for those who are not normatively constituted, whether mentally, physically, or emotionally (2006:4). The distinction of disability essentially becomes a justification for ostracizing anyone who cannot conform to what society deems to be an acceptable way of life. In retelling the tale of the Donkey Lady, many individuals gloss over the fact that the initial cause of the Donkey Lady’s disfigurement is a violent outburst from her own community. So much emphasis is placed on the *cucuy* (frightening) aspect of the story that blame is seemingly placed on the Donkey Lady for the violence that has been enacted upon her. A detailed reading of the Donkey Lady legend, however, exposes issues regarding inattentiveness towards unwarranted acts of violence against non-normative women.

Because the Donkey Lady is a spinster caring for a child-like animal, she essentially becomes a transgressive character, deliberately acting against that which is considered to be normal for a woman. Rather than marrying, reproducing, and maintaining normative domestic roles, the Donkey Lady resists these roles, opting for the distinction of spinster and thereby establishing animosity between her and the men of the community. In her book *The Spinster And Her Enemies*, Sheila Jeffreys explains the attitude towards spinsters as that of “contempt for a creature who was chaste and therefore inhuman” (1997:90). This view of spinster women as inhuman due to their unwillingness to submit to normative gender roles resonates exponentially within the Donkey Lady folktale as it further suggests that the woman’s non-normative status is the main reason why she becomes brutalized. Living as a queer character, queer simply meaning non-normative, and making what Jeffreys refers to as “a positive choice not to marry,” the Donkey Lady is automatically viewed as less than human and therefore devalued as the result of her transgressive status (1997:88). The dehumanized perception that the community has of the

Donkey Lady is clearly a major contributing factor in her violent disfigurement. It is almost as if the men of the community seek to turn her into the inhuman monster they consider her to be by setting fire to her home and causing her to appear animalistic rather than human.

The relationship between the woman and her donkey represents yet another contributing factor to the hostility and animosity between the woman and her community. Rather than using the donkey for labor, the woman views the donkey as more of a child than a laborious animal. The maternal feelings the woman displays toward the donkey complicate the relationship between woman and beast as this queer, non-normative relationship can be seen as representing failed motherhood. As previously mentioned, the woman is chastised for caring for the donkey as a child, but in allowing the animal to injure an actual child, the woman exhibits a form of failed maternity. Instead of protecting the child from the donkey, an act that would presumably align with a normative woman's maternal instincts, the woman allows her symbolic child, the donkey, to inflict pain on the child. In failing to intervene during the incident and essentially siding with the donkey, the woman establishes herself as a queer mother figure, resisting normative maternal instincts and instead taking part in a queer, non-normative maternal relationship with her donkey. Interestingly, the Donkey Lady's failed maternity aligns with the failed maternity in the La Llorona folklore, but deviates significantly due to the fact that the Donkey Lady represents a queer motherhood. The queer motherhood that the Donkey Lady creates for herself becomes conflated with her transgressive, non-normative identity as she is now not only a spinster woman, but also a non-productive, queer mother caring for a creature that she herself did not birth. For this reason, the Donkey Lady's inaction toward her donkey's retaliation triggers the series of violent events that occur following the children's taunting.

The location of Donkey Lady Bridge is also a contributing factor in the complicated and violent relationship that develops between the Donkey Lady and the community that brutalizes her as the bridge's liminal location works to solidify her non-normative status. The bridge itself is located in a space that is between both urban and rural locations; it is surrounded by rural, undeveloped land, yet it is not free from the urbanization that follows its distinction as a multiuse trail. Skirting the lines of both communities, Donkey Lady Bridge establishes itself as a third space within which the Donkey Lady resides. Philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault conceives of these third spaces, or liminal locations, as those places "in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (1986:25). The Donkey Lady fits this description



Figure 1 Donkey Lady Bridge, San Antonio, March 2014. Photo by author.

through her transgressions against what the community considers to be normative behavior for a woman. Thus Donkey Lady Bridge represents the woman's denied passage into the normative world as it physically separates her from the normative community, thereby solidifying her queer status.

Although her queer status forces the Donkey Lady to live in a liminal space, divorced from the rest of the community, her secluded liminality does not prevent the community from forcefully intruding on her solitude when provoked by the donkey's attack. As Foucault points out, in general, liminal locations such as Donkey Lady Bridge are not "freely accessible like a public place," requiring those who wish to enter to "have certain permission and make certain gestures" (1986:26), yet in the case of the Donkey Lady, this permission is never given. What results is the forced entry of the normative world into a queered, deviant third space that the Donkey Lady inhabits. This forced entry, within both the Donkey Lady narrative and the legend-trip to Donkey Lady Bridge, becomes representative of the violent intrusion of normative prejudice into the vulnerable world of the non-normative, leading to the ghastly brutalization of the Donkey Lady.

Each of these immediate causes for the Donkey Lady's disfigurement exposes prejudices that lead to blame being placed on non-normative victims rather than the perpetrators of violence against

such individuals, while simultaneously revealing a broad history of social injustice against those who are non-normative. Within the Donkey Lady narrative, it may seem as though the woman's inaction and generally lax attitude toward her donkey's attack on the child invites brutality against her, but blame for these acts should be placed with the party responsible rather than the victim of such a violent act. By ignoring pre-existing prejudices against the Donkey Lady, participants in the folktale seek to reinforce predispositions for placing blame on victims rather than focusing attention on the reasons behind such brutalization.

Concerned primarily with the delightfully terrifying thought of a beast-like woman lurking in the woods near a bridge, San Antonians fail to consider the reasons behind the woman's animalistic deformations. In doing so, these individuals are ignorant of the fact that the Donkey Lady is actually the victim of a cruel display of violence, rather than some nameless woman who becomes disfigured in a house fire. The failure of most, if not all, San Antonians to recognize that the cause behind this violence is the Donkey Lady's queer identity leads to the belief that the woman is somehow responsible for her own disfigurement. However, this is not the case. It is integral to the Donkey Lady folktale to understand that the woman's disfigurement comes not at her own hands, but at the hands of a violent community seeking to expel her for her non-normative status. Furthermore, in ignoring the fact that the Donkey Lady is a victim within her folktale, participants regress into the sociohistorical role of placing blame with victims of violent attacks rather than offenders. What this problematic role translates to is the perpetuation of the idea that the Donkey Lady initially 'had it coming,' a belief that is likely the reason for the Donkey Lady's haunting.

Additionally, suggesting that the Donkey Lady somehow invited this violent event as a result of her inaction raises troubling queries about the woman's agency within the Donkey Lady narrative. By implying that the woman had this event coming to her, participants in the Donkey Lady narrative take away any agency the woman may have had. Rather than her being responsible for the events that happen to her, the woman is no longer in control of the events that happen in her life if those who transmit the tale believe this violence to be inevitable. What this suggests is that the Donkey Lady is only enabled with agency when she acts of her own volition, not when participants in the narrative make dangerous assumptions about the woman's relationship to her community. Also interesting about the Donkey Lady's struggle for agency is the fact that the woman remains nameless in the Donkey Lady narrative until she becomes the victim of unwarranted brutality.

According to the accounts of numerous San Antonians, the name of the woman is not known within the Donkey Lady narrative; instead she is simply referred to as a mysterious recluse. Because the woman is not named until after her disfigurement, her identity is entangled in her distinction as a disabled character, granting her partial agency through her disabled status.

In disregarding all notions of violence inflicted against a non-normative woman, readers enact historical views of cruelty and force towards those unwilling or unable to conform. These prejudices against transgressive individuals reaffirm broad sociohistorical views of non-normative women, spinsters, queer mothers, etc., as having no place in society and thus becoming the victims of violence and backlash from the communities that reject them. Such is the case of San Antonio's Donkey Lady. As a result of the act of savage brutality performed against the Donkey Lady she is left horribly disfigured, causing her to descend further from the normative and forcing her to shelter herself within the overgrowth and solitude of Donkey Lady Bridge. Because of the sociopolitical issues surrounding the narrative of the Donkey Lady, her legend continues to haunt minds of San Antonio residents, carrying with it an underlying current of issues regarding both gender based violence and violence towards the non-normative.

Reading Disability in The Legend-Trip

Beyond the immediate transparency of the Donkey Lady narrative, bodily disfigurement becomes a form of disability as it invites historically prescribed attitudes of fear, disgust, and fascination towards that which is non-normative. In her book *Encarnación: Illness and Body Politics in Chicana Feminist Literature*, Suzanne Bost describes bodily disfigurement in terms of corporeal failure, "challeng[ing]...how bodies should work, look, and feel" (2010:5). And while the Donkey Lady's disfigurement is not an illness, the failure of her body to work like a normally constituted body causes her to be seen as a disabled character. This rationale is the most logical as it suggests that because the Donkey Lady no longer has the appearance of a regular woman, her body no longer represents what is considered to be a normal physical appearance, rendering her disabled by normative body standards. This form of corporeal disability leads the Donkey Lady's body to become symbolic of "the marks of history" that unite those with "shared [experiences] that create, remedy, or reproduce illness" (2010:5). The marks of history that Bost refers to are those instances when injustices have been enacted upon those with disabilities or illnesses, such as the exploitation of the Donkey Lady's bodily disfigurement for entertainment purposes. With this in mind, it

is clear that the Donkey Lady's disability "makes political demands" (2010:5) while creating a link between her suffering and the shared suffering of the community, or collective, of the disabled, their non-normative bodies demanding equal treatment in the face of continued exclusion.

Furthermore, I assert that the act of visiting Donkey Lady Bridge becomes a performance of the spectacle and attraction of disability as it serves as a means of gawking at that which is considered "monstrous" (*Scary For Kids* [n.d.]). The rationale behind many adventurers' visits to Donkey Lady Bridge involves catching a glimpse of this "thing," a "beastly apparition" said to lurk in the bushes and respond to the taunts of thrill seekers (*ibid.*). One San Antonio native, who is increasingly familiar with the tale and was willing to share her experiences with the legend-trip, noted how the act of visiting Donkey Lady Bridge was "a way for [our group of friends] to find out if that creature was really out there, if she really did exist and look the way that everyone describes her" (Sanchez 2015). This rationale proves to be problematic in that it asserts the notion that the Donkey Lady is, in fact, a sort of freak show to be taken in for the viewing pleasure of those who visit her bridge. By establishing the Donkey Lady as a source of fetishized fascination, patrons of Donkey Lady Bridge reaffirm the historical point of view that disability should be looked upon as a source of entertainment. Additionally, the need for individuals to seek out the Donkey Lady to fulfill a dare or prove their bravery illustrates a collective history of fear and disgust in the face of disability. As the *San Antonio Express-News* states, many of the individuals searching for Donkey Lady Bridge only do so as a means of thrill seeking, staring fear in the face and looking upon its hideous appearance (2006). The assumption here is that viewing the disabled woman is somehow associated with braving a terrifying and otherworldly specter. Just as the act of visiting the Donkey Lady for entertainment is problematic, the association of fear and repugnance with the Donkey Lady creates a situation in which disability is seen as shameful and fearful existence. Within this assertion of the attraction and fascination associated with the Donkey Lady's corporeal failure and legend-tripping to Donkey Lady Bridge lies a representation of San Antonio's own history of exploitation of disability.

In San Antonio, specifically, the problematic historical viewpoint of disability as entertainment is exhibited through the persistence of San Antonio's Circus Museum collection. Established by prominent San Antonio lawyer and civic leader Harry Hertzberg, the Hertzberg Circus Museum collection is "the oldest public circus collection in the United States and one of the largest [collections] in existence" (O'Connor

2010). Created as part of Hertzberg's emphatic love of the circus, the Hertzberg collection consists of various pieces of circus memorabilia including the wildly popular 'Side-show exhibit,' featuring photographs, cutouts, and diagrams representing popular side-show oddities and performers from the heyday of the freak show (2010). The items in the collection were displayed within the San Antonio Public Library in 1942 and remained with the library through its various moves to new locations, before finally being transferred to San Antonio's Witte Museum in 2003 (Young 2010).² Although the collection has changed hands and been relocated numerous times, it remains on display both within the Witte and at the front doors of the museum where a circus elephant statue greets entering guests. The persistence of the Circus Museum has been secured by the Witte Museum as they plan to include "visible storage and publically accessible research spaces with a special area dedicated to the circus collection" as part of a recent museum renovation (*ibid.*). The permanence of the Circus Museum, and more specifically the sideshow exhibit, exposes San Antonio's long history of viewing disability as a form of attraction and entertainment, a problematic relationship that carries over into the legend-trip to Donkey Lady Bridge. Much like the performers showcased in the sideshow exhibit at the Circus Museum, the Donkey Lady is exploited for entertainment's sake as part of San Antonio's complicated history concerning disability. Thus the ongoing fetishized fascination with the attraction of disability becomes the epitome of the Donkey Lady's continuous haunting of San Antonio.

In establishing the Donkey Lady as a source of fetishized fascination, patrons of Donkey Lady Bridge ultimately engage in relieving the Donkey Lady of agency, placing full control in the hands of the normative spectator. The loss of agency can serve as one interpretation for the Donkey Lady's supposed display of violence towards those who venture to disturb her solitude. By damaging car hoods and windshields, the Donkey Lady regains agency by bringing awareness to the sociohistorical and sociopolitical issues concerning disability, heteronormativity, and gender violence that beckon her to remain at the forefront of San Antonio storytelling. Her representation of the anger and hostility of the disabled leaves literal dents with those who come to find her.

Establishing a Collective Narrative

The Donkey Lady folklore is more than a mere source of entertainment and fascination for the Chicana/o community that frequently visits her; the connection between San Antonio's Chicana/o community and the Donkey Lady folklore reveals yet another complex facet to the folklore

that cannot be overlooked. Because the folktale takes place in San Antonio, a city with a large population of Chicanas/os, it is necessary to explore the meaning associated with the predominance of Chicanas/os both circulating the folktale and making the proverbial pilgrimage to Donkey Lady Bridge. In taking part in the legend-trip, Chicanas/os are not divorced from the history of exploitation and fear associated with visiting Donkey Lady Bridge, but instead perform the ritualistic act of coaxing the Donkey Lady from hiding in order to ensure that she continues to illuminate social issues concerning the objectionable treatment of San Antonio's Chicana/o community. In this way, the Donkey Lady's disability can be understood as both connecting the injustices of the past with the present, while also suggesting a repressed, or otherwise unrecognized, identification of San Antonio's Chicana/o community with the folk character.

Disability has previously been exploited to justify discrimination against those who are considered differently abled, with disability often becoming conflated with race to defend inhumane actions towards both the disabled and those of non-hegemonic races (James and Wu 2006:4). As Jennifer James and Cynthia Wu remark, disability is like race in its inherent tradition of alienation and subjugation (2006:5). Being a minority, no matter the racial or ethnic group, an individual is rejected by the hegemony, making it increasingly difficult to create a viable space for a productive life. Much like disability, race and ethnicity become an obstacle that is nearly impossible to overcome in the face of rampant discrimination, thus race becomes a handicap in and of itself. This conflation of race and disability is demonstrated within the Donkey Lady folklore as the site of Donkey Lady Bridge establishes a collective narrative of the marginalization of racial difference.

Though the Donkey Lady folklore is typically viewed as a frightening tale of a woman gone mad with revenge, what many participants in the folktale gloss over is the fact that the site of the folktale is not merely a location for the folkloric performance of a cultural imaginary. Rather, Donkey Lady Bridge acts as a site of what ethnographer and scholar José Limón refers to as an "emergent collective narrative," calling attention to the causes behind and reactions to disability (1994:174). As the location where a "recurrent belief exists," Donkey Lady Bridge becomes a site for the cultural connection between the Donkey Lady and the San Antonio Chicana/o community that continues to retell and pass on the Donkey Lady's narrative to younger generations (ibid.). In creating an emergent collective narrative, the Donkey Lady folklore becomes an avenue through which the Chicano/a community identifies with the Donkey Lady, the exploitation of her disability becoming conflated with the

unfair treatment of Chicanas/os. It would seem as though the predominance of Chicanas/os telling the story suggests that Chicana/o participants in the folklore, whether they are fully cognizant of it or not, are in some way identifying with the marginalization felt by the donkey lady. This rationale is certainly plausible if the agitation and exploitation enacted by Chicanas/os at Donkey Lady Bridge is seen as a projection of the Chicana/o community's perpetual feelings of marginalization. If this is the case, the Donkey Lady's cultural haunting becomes representative of the community's identification with her as her haunting becomes a form of advocacy for the marginalized Chicana/o community. By portraying the Donkey Lady as an advocate for the San Antonio Chicana/o community, the Donkey Lady folklore complicates established beliefs of San Antonio folklore as ostensive healing or social control. Instead, the Donkey Lady becomes an extension of the Chicana/o community's fears, anger, marginalization, and disenfranchisement. Thus, the Donkey Lady's suggested advocacy opens a new avenue of thought in which a folk character transcends the boundaries of folk status, coming alive in a very real way for the community that both receives and transmits her folktale.

To this point I would like to propose that the Donkey Lady, specifically in her violent behavior towards those who dare to conjure her, can be seen as an extension of what Gloria Anzaldúa dubs the Shadow-Beast. Described as the rebel inside of her, Anzaldúa's Shadow-Beast is the representation of that which will not accept the constraints of normativity, "kick[ing] out with both feet" in protest of limitations and prejudices. In a literal kicking out of feet (hooves), the Donkey Lady strikes back against the collective history of subjugation brought upon her by those frequenting her bridge (2007:38). Furthermore, I contend that the Donkey Lady represents the Shadow-Beast in all Chicanas/os; she is that force that will not be tamed and will not be silenced. She lingers on the tongues and in the minds of San Antonio's Chicana/o community because her haunting represents the need for social change, the need to strike back against the constraints and limitations brought on by identifying as a Chicana/o. In becoming the Shadow-Beast, the Donkey Lady, and the Chicana/o community that she represents, carry on what the donkey started, striking back at those who taunt the marginalized and exploited. This act of striking back at the hegemony leaves marks that illustrate an inability to accept the subjugation and exploitation of Chicanas/os by the hegemonic classes and races, and solidifies the Donkey Lady as a cultural projection of the Chicana/o community.

Conclusion

More than a terrifying tale of a disfigured donkey-woman seeking revenge against those who caused her ill-fated transformation, the legend of San Antonio's Donkey Lady exposes a collective history of violence, fear, fascination, and misunderstanding of disability. Research on the Donkey Lady provides insight into the complex intersections of ethnicity and ability that are reflective of broad histories of marginalization. Her representation of the non-normative allows for multiple interpretations of how the transgressive have been and continue to be looked down upon, chastised, and degraded by hegemonic structures while also insisting that the Donkey Lady be viewed as an advocate for social change. Rather than simply explaining the Donkey Lady legend as a means of social control used by the Chicana/o community or a form of participation in ostensive healing, this research complicates demonstrated epistemologies regarding the relationship between folklore, legend-trips, and the communities or groups that keep these stories alive. This development in the body of folkloric and ethnographic research opens up alternate avenues for creating cultural meaning and establishing the overall significance of folk narratives, and in doing so, gives a voice to one of San Antonio, Texas's most popular and iconic folk characters.

Notes

¹ For a more in-depth reading of cultural haunting see Brogan (1998) and Holland (2000).

² Harry Hertzberg indicated in his will that the Witte Museum be given sole ownership of the collection should the city of San Antonio no longer be able to care for the collection.

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