

Re-figuring the Future Through 3D Printing *Jinn*

Morehshin Allahyari's Re-figuring as a Tool of Resistance

Zeynep Naz Inansal

Utrecht University, the Netherlands

ABSTRACT

She Who Sees the Unknown (2017) is an ongoing artistic research project by Iranian multi-media artist Morehshin Allahyari in which she recreates monstrous female figures of Middle Eastern origin (*jinn*) through 3D printing technology and her concept of 're-figuring'. The latter refers to the conscious reclaiming and re-appropriating of the stories of female figures of *jinn*. This article is dedicated to exploring the concept of re-figuring, Allahyari's artistic research process that involves recreating the stories of Middle Eastern monstrous figures. It shows how through re-figuring, she reclaims these *jinn* and empowers them to challenge contemporary forms of oppression. She highlights their strengths and the ways they can be powerful figures in both the past as well as the present. Through this work, she has created a freely available online archive, as well as a physical archive of 3D printed sculptures of the figures and multi-media artworks that include new media forms like video and virtual animation. In order to explain how re-figuring can be seen as a tool of resistance, this article discusses feminist philosopher Donna Haraway's ideas on the use of storytelling as such a tool. Furthermore, the workings of Afrofuturism and counterfuturisms are suggested as concepts that are helpful for better understanding how re-figuring functions in *She Who Sees the Unknown*. Ultimately, this article argues that re-figuring is a tool of resistance for Allahyari.

KEYWORDS

Re-figuring, *Jinn*, Middle Eastern Futurism, Morehshin Allahyari, *She Who Sees the Unknown*

INTRODUCTION

‘All of this has happened before, and all of this will happen again’
— Battlestar Galactica (2004-2009)

In 2017, Iranian-born multimedia artist Morehshin Allahyari began *She Who Sees the Unknown*, a project through which she conducts artistic research on monstrous female figures of Middle Eastern origin, known as *jinn*, reviving them through using 3D printing technology (Allahyari 2019)¹. Through this work, she has created a freely available online archive, as well as a physical archive of 3D printed sculptures of the figures and multi-media artworks that include

new media forms like video and virtual animation. Her process includes researching *jinn*, recreating them through 3D modeling and printing, and re-writing their stories by connecting each figure and their story to a modern form of oppression. She names this concept of consciously reclaiming the figure through re-appropriating their story as ‘re-figuring’. The figures that she chose to put through the re-figuring process are female *jinn*; that is, figures from Middle Eastern folklore that have been forgotten over time and historically negatively interpreted. Through re-figuring, she reclaims these *jinn* and empowers them so that they challenge contemporary forms of oppression, revealing their strengths and the ways in which they can be understood as powerful figures in both the past as well as the present. It is important to keep in mind that Allahyari does not completely overthrow power structures, but creates new ones that can function as counter-dominant narratives. This act of re-figuring can also be seen as a form of alternative futurism, which will be explained in detail in the last section.

Thus, the focus of this paper will be on Allahyari’s concept of re-figuring and how she uses it as a tool of resistance in her artistic practice. Using the figures of *jinn* from Allahyari’s project as my case studies, I will position re-figuring as a form of alternative futurism that offers a resistant act of dealing with the past, present, and future through storytelling. To do so, I will use feminist philosopher Donna Haraway’s ideas in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016). The link between the two is clear; Haraway positions storytelling as a necessary tool to resist troubling times, and Allahyari directly refers to Haraway as an inspiration in creating the concept of re-figuring (2017). Therefore, I will connect Allahyari’s aim of creating multiple futures through re-figuring to Haraway’s ideas about ‘staying with the trouble’, an idea that refers to embracing the dark side and the monstrous, and their value in resistance. Furthermore, I will support her text with writings on Afrofuturism and counterfuturisms to enable a better understanding of how re-figuring fits within the discourse of alternative futurisms. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how re-figuring is a tool of resistance for Allahyari.

ON RE-FIGURING

Allahyari uses re-figuring to conceptualize the intentions of her artistic research in *She Who Sees the Unknown*, and as a term to describe her artistic process. It is the act of retrieving certain forgotten figures in order to re-imagine a different kind of future through their use. In this particular case, she re-appropriates the stories of the powerful female *jinn* from the Middle East that have negative connotations and changes the interpretation of their stories. Through re-figuring, she repositions female *jinn* in the present, placing them in the center of contemporary

narratives that feature their revised versions brought together with a contemporary form of oppression. Allahyari describes re-figuring as ‘an act of going back and retrieving the past’ that is about ‘activation and preservation’ (Allahyari 2016). This activation happens through resurfacing these *jinn*; that is, in re-writing these stories from the past and questioning if this could lead to imagining other kinds of stories in the present and future. The artist remediates these female *jinn*, turning them from their more traditional depictions in 2D paintings into 3D models and objects. In this, she also gives them a physical form and also makes a critical intervention into how histories are preserved. She rethinks these figures not only in their form and physicality, but also through her engagement with these stories, thus making a critical intervention in their representation and taking responsibility through reproducing their stories. On the other hand, the preservation happens through creating an archive that features reproduced versions of *jinn*. Importantly, this archive that Allahyari creates is freely available online, which creates another layer of visibility that once more empowers *jinn*. Furthermore, reclaiming these stories effectively resists their extinction and erasure, thus serving the purpose of an evermore inclusive archive. Ultimately, through creating this archive of monstrous female figures from the Middle East, the project can be seen as an important contribution to the preservation of Middle Eastern cultural heritage, but, vitally, Allahyari does so in such a way that also invites a rethinking of the choices of what is preserved in the archive itself.

Allahyari argues that these powerful monstrous female figures from Middle Eastern folklore have been traditionally interpreted as negative figures and so have not been generally considered as important as the myths of male superheroes (Allahyari 2019). Therefore, she reworks their stories with an emphasis on their power and how they might be relevant in the present for dealing with contemporary forms of oppression. With each re-figuring, Allahyari resituates the *jinn* as figures who reflect on the effects of past and present oppression. In this, she embraces their monstrosity and creates new figures that can be used, in her words, ‘to challenge and change the power structures that exist in our political and social realities’ (Allahyari 2019). Re-figuring these female *jinn* is also a form of empowering them, as Allahyari is shifting the power in the stories by depicting the *jinn* as mighty figures. She explains that through this practice, she examines the effects of different forms of oppression such as colonialism (Allahyari 2019). *She Who Sees the Unknown* reflects on digital² and historical colonialism through creating this archive of *jinn*, featuring their histories, stories, and representations. The project reflects upon the selective aspect of writing history and the carrying of figures to the present by creating its own alternative history, from which we can reflect upon and question the present. For each story, she pairs a contemporary form of oppression with a particular *jinn* whose power and qualities are uniquely suited to address and challenge this

oppression. This revisiting provides a historical point of view for the stories and revising them aims to free these figures through empowerment. Re-figuring thus repurposes stories and narratives as tools for resistance and intervention, not removing hierarchies or power structures, but shifting them towards previously marginalized perspectives that as yet are unseen or unheard in order to reveal how their contribution is valuable.

Allahyari's main source for the project is the Arabic manuscript *Kitab al-bulhan* (compiled by Abd al-Hasan Al-Isfahani) from the 14th century, translated to English as *The Book of Wonders*. It is an illustrated book that contains images and stories of monsters and *jinn*, a text that functions as a Middle Eastern encyclopedia of supernatural things. Islamic Art specialist Stefano Carboni discusses the manuscript extensively in his article 'The "Book of Surprises" (Kitab al-bulhan) of the Bodleian Library' (2013), bringing attention to the comprehensive quality of the book and explaining that it provides information on various stories and myths from the Middle Eastern region, namely Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Turkey. Allahyari decided to focus on the female *jinn* in this book during her initial research process for *She Who Sees the Unknown*. She wanted to use them for 'reimagining a new kind of Middle East and world with a female, non-cis, non-white, non-Western future' (Allahyari 2018). Allahyari's call for multiple and plural futures inclusive of non-Western others and bodies resonates with the ideas raised by forms of counterfuturism, especially the Middle Eastern futurism movement. After this introduction to the source material Allahyari used, it is now necessary to take a closer look at the *jinn* and some examples that demonstrate how this re-figuring can be a tool for resistance.

Allahyari's choice of *jinn* is an educated one, as they are figures that are suitable for re-figuring and open to change. In his book *Islam, Arabs, and Intelligent World of the Jinn* (2009), scholar of Arabic language and culture, Amira El-Zein, offers an extensive look at the figure of the *jinn*. He brings attention to the dual dimensional aspect of the *jinn* and their 'ability to live and operate in both manifest and invisible domains' (34), referring to them as 'shape-shifters' (46). He explains that 'the Qur'an speaks of *jinn* as having free will like humans' (57) and that they are to be held accountable for their actions by God. He describes that 'their bodies are made of fire and air, which allow them to move about through space more easily than humans' (61). In her artworks featuring *jinn*, Allahyari uses these figures to create new stories that contain her own experience regarding contemporary forms of oppression. Therefore, through using *jinn*, the artist aims to reclaim the stories and figures that are left *outside* in order to create new *portals* of thinking and imagining. She also emphasizes the importance of these figures having free will. As she resituates and repositions these figures in current stories that reflect upon the present, past, and future, she emphasizes the importance of doing this with figures that can make

independent choices. She re-imagines a future where victims of oppression have free will, choice, and power. For instance, this is demonstrated in Allahyari's re-appropriation of the *Laughing Snake's* story, where the *jinn* reclaims its own body and chooses its own faith. In all of the forthcoming stories, the *jinn* bring forth new commentary and information on contemporary forms of oppression, specifically those directly experienced by Allahyari herself.

Ya'Jooj and Ma'Jooj are two figures that are featured in the Qur'an who are known to cause mischief and create chaos on Earth. They are also depicted as nine-headed hydras in *Kitab al Bulhan*. Allahyari's re-figuring of *Ya'Jooj and Ma'Jooj* offers commentary regarding the stories' or myths' roles in the creation of both others and monsters, demonstrating how narratives are constructed. The myth in *Kitab al Bulhan* suggests that they both were separated from humans by an iron wall that was built by Alexander the Great, but they continued to cause fear as they still posed a threat to the human world. According to their prophecy, one day *Ya'Jooj* and *Ma'Jooj* will break down the iron wall and this act will signal the end of days and destruction of the human world (Allahyari 2019). Allahyari created a video³ that contains the 3D modeling process of *Ya'Jooj* and *Ma'Jooj*, and she re-imagined their story in a setting where the iron wall separating the *jinn* and the humans is broken. The video shows the figures being 3D modeled, with a voiceover by Allahyari telling the story in which *Ya'jooj* and *Ma'Jooj* break down the wall and come together with the earth, only to be exiled again⁴. The story depicts an eternal loop where the *jinn* keep coming back only to be pushed out again. Through re-figuring of the story of *Ya'jooj* and *Ma'jooj*, Allahyari brings attention to the constant Othering of certain people by turning them into something monstrous. The artwork also establishes that the "monstrous" others that are pushed outside will always come back. Depicting the incomplete versions of the figures and their creation process with a story of their monstrousness also highlights and reflects on the creation process of these figures. This signals that action can still be taken, as the creation is not yet complete.

Another version of the artwork was presented as a Virtual Reality experience⁵ at Parsons Institute, Sheila Johnson Design Center in February 2019, as a part of the exhibition 'Speculative Cultures: A Virtual Reality Exhibition.' In the installation, the viewer is invited to stand on a maze drawn onto paper, and through the VR experience, they can go inside the story of *Ya'Jooj* and *Ma'Jooj*. The audience enters a dark place, where their movements are limited, and they are left facing the elements of the story such as the iron wall and the 3D modeled versions of *Ya'jooj* and *Ma'jooj*. The viewer cannot move around the space to explore but can only stand at a certain spot and watch; some movements, such as hand gestures, are requested from the viewer in order to continue the story. The VR experience shows *Ya'jooj* and *Ma'jooj*

creating fires and destroying objects. The viewer is involved in the sense that they are inside the story's world, where they can watch the events and are required to participate in certain moments with hand gestures. The storyteller controls the viewer in the sense that the movements that are required are decided by the storyteller. As the audience participates in the chaos through making the movements that continue the story, which in turn makes the *jinn* create chaos in the virtual, Allahyari thus makes the audience question their participation and contribution in creating monstrous others as well as chaos. Considering that the experience offers a maze where the outcome is predetermined by the artist and is therefore in a sense inevitable, she questions compliance in certain outcomes that we seemingly have no choice over. The limitations that are put on how the audience can react to the story reflects on the effects of compliance, as Allahyari's accompanying commentary makes clear when she discusses how seeing ourselves as not having any other choice can still make us compliant. The audience still has the choice of not participating in the experience, but this choice doesn't appear to be an option for them.

Another *jinn* that has gone through Allahyari's process of re-figuring is *Huma*. In the original story, *Huma* possesses human bodies, giving them fevers. Allahyari reworks *Huma*'s story by re-imagining it in the context of a major catastrophe of our time: global warming. Her rewritten story is told through a video that features a 3D model of *Huma* and Allahyari narrating the story. In this new version, *Huma* creates fever in human bodies, making all temperatures equal in every part of the world. She creates the catastrophe of global warming but destroys injustice in her way of giving all humans the same conditions in this disaster. The video was also exhibited in the form of an installation with a 3D printed sculpture of *Huma* along with her talismans at Transfer Gallery in Los Angeles in 2017. Through this re-figuring, Allahyari brings attention to the uneven consequences that global warming would have and starts a discussion. On her website, she points to professor Erik Swyngedouw's essay 'Apocalypse Now! Fear and Doomsday Pleasures' (2013) as the inspiration behind this story. The essay demonstrates how the fears surrounding global warming are fears of the elite, explaining that the horrible outcomes of this catastrophe are already the current living conditions of many people on less privileged sides of the world. In this artwork, Allahyari questions the concept of a common catastrophe by using *Huma* as a tool of resistance. *Huma* functions as a reminder that even 'common' catastrophes are not inclusive in some cases. This also questions the inclusivity of the future imaginaries in the general sense.

The final example of re-figuring is the *Laughing Snake*. The myth of the *Laughing Snake* tells the story of a *jinn*—half woman, half snake—that takes over a village, wreaking havoc and

killing people. She is only killed when a man holds a mirror up to her face, causing her to die of laughter (Allahyari 2019). Allahyari's version of the story has two different endings; one where the *Laughing Snake* dies of laughter when she sees her reflection *within* this world, and another where she kills her oppressors. The story builds up to these endings in the form of a hypertextual interactive narrative, held by the Whitney Museum's online collection, where the viewer can navigate the story by clicking on certain keywords. These keywords offer another layer of claiming power through assigning terms and categories. Through her storytelling style, Allahyari draws parallels between the *jinn* and the woman, with the latter eventually turning into the *jinn* in the *Laughing Snake* in the ending of the artist's retold story. Both the narrative and the narration style function as tools for empowerment for both the *jinn* and the woman, as well as for Allahyari herself. The hypertext begins without offering any choice to the viewer, who simply click through the story via the only option presented in each section. The first time that the viewer is given a choice of navigating the story as they want is precisely the moment where re-figuring happens. The original version of the myth takes the reader through multiple options and choices that lead to various moments of oppression that Allahyari experienced growing up in the Middle East. The re-figured version of the story makes multiple outcomes available to the reader, all where Allahyari turns into the *Laughing Snake* and thus becomes empowered through taking control of her body. The re-figuring of the story and its meaning is specifically discussed as the change in the look or the gaze of the *jinn* in the *Laughing Snake*. Thus, the repositioning of this gaze functions as a way of breaking down of the voyeuristic look towards the monster and monstrous. The parallels between the monster and the woman also make this a form of empowerment for the women featured in the story, as well as for Allahyari herself. The story of the *Laughing Snake* challenges the presumption of a male gaze, empowering the monster and monstrous and giving it agency over its own body and representation. This empowerment is evoked by a change in the female gaze and through reframing the central act of laughter, through which the *Laughing Snake* and the woman both reclaim their bodies and take their reflections back.

Through re-figuring *jinn*, Allahyari makes them a part of the imagination of the future. In each of the aforementioned stories of re-figuring, she imagines a future where these *jinn* are empowered and free. She stresses the need for expanding our imagination and introducing 'a new set of figures that do not come from white or western knowledge and structures' (Allahyari 2019), especially when thinking about a plurality of possible futures, technologies, and power structures. She suggests retiring Haraway's famous figure of the cyborg (Haraway 1984), stating, 'If Haraway claimed to be 'a cyborg rather than a motherly/earthy goddess,' I claim to be a Jinn rather than a cyborg' (Allahyari 2019). This is a direct reference to Haraway's *A*

Cyborg Manifesto (1984), which calls for resistance to binary oppositions such as race, class, gender – all forms of Cartesian dualisms, and also to the idea of the earth centering around humanity. Haraway reinforces her call by adopting the figure of the cyborg as one that ‘can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves’ (181). Haraway takes the cyborg myth and separates it from the idea of technology being a tool or a servant to humanity, and instead proposes a rethinking of the possibilities that could be created through a fusion of human and machine. She ends her manifesto with, ‘I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess’ (181). In this, Haraway’s cyborg can also be seen as a figure of resistance. However, through proposing the figure of the *jinn* over the cyborg, Allahyari makes a clear statement in favor of the necessity of plural resistance figures from various backgrounds. In her statement, the artist doesn’t necessarily dismiss Haraway’s cyborg but urges the need for multiple figures from different backgrounds and cultures when thinking of new worlds. She brings attention to the fact that most of the imagination on the future comes from white or Western knowledges and structure of thought, especially regarding technology, and argues that important change starts in engaging with and participating in these discussions. She chooses the figure of the *jinn* in her act of re-figuring as her way of joining the discussion on the future on her own terms.

RE-FIGURING STORYTELLING

Allahyari joins the discussion on the future through the process of re-figuring and through emphasizing the need for questioning the existing narratives and stories that we use to imagine and discuss the future, positioning storytelling as a tool for resistance that can be used to challenge power structures and to discuss contemporary experiences of oppression. A creative and activist practice that challenges the existing master narratives, re-figuring is the recreation of existing figures in order to meditate on the present, past, and future. It is a thinking process that questions dominant ideas of the future through different fictions, which also manifests itself in material practice. Re-figuring thus uses storytelling as a tool to manifest itself. In order to emphasize the potential of stories and figures, Allahyari points to the following quote from Haraway’s book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016):

It matters which stories tell stories, which concepts think concepts. Mathematically, visually, and narratively, it matters which figures figure figures, which systems systematize systems (Haraway 2016, 101)

As Haraway describes beautifully, the stories, figures, and concepts that we choose to speak, think, and make sense of the world with, matter deeply. They have the potential of world-building, of creating ideas and actions. Thus, storytelling is a form of thinking that allows a unique imagination and freedom in meditating on complicated subjects. Re-figuring also positions storytelling as a powerful tool of intervention and invites us to question our stories, while at the same time, introduces new tools to build new worlds. Haraway questions the existing stories in this book, where she explains that storytelling must go beyond ‘the box of human exceptionalism’ (39) and suggests telling the stories of other creatures that humanity shares the earth with, further challenging human-centered master narratives. Allahyari challenges these master narratives and argues that she aims to move beyond the binary views of ‘West vs. Islam, tech-future vs. religious history, and to look at forgotten, misrepresented and suppressed histories and narratives’ (Allahyari 2017). Both Haraway and Allahyari stress the need for a change in our stories and our tools for imagining and thinking, and the process of re-figuring offers a way for us to do so through emphasizing the value of looking back and examining ourselves, our stories, and our narratives once more. It reveals how the idea of human exceptionalism refers to a very specific form of human, and that new stories should not be formed before taking responsibility for the old ones. Re-figuring demands change through re-creation and re-appropriation. It brings forth the necessity of recycling stories rather than simply dismissing them. This presents a form of resistance that claims responsibility and also makes a statement on the need for going back and rethinking existing ideas. Ultimately, Haraway repositions storytelling as a conscious act that comprises of educated choices that have powerful outcomes, and Allahyari’s project applies this idea of storytelling to an artistic archive, demonstrating the role of storytelling in the ideas on past, present, and future.

RE-FIGURING THE FUTURE

Allahyari points to the necessity of rethinking the future as well as the past. In this final section, I demonstrate how re-figuring can be seen as a form of counterfuturism. This is inspired by media scholar Jussi Parikka's observations in his article ‘Middle East and other futurisms: imaginary temporalities in contemporary art and visual culture’ (2018), where he discusses counterfuturisms and their relationship to temporalities. Parikka examines the ways in which Afrofuturism, Gulf futurism, and Middle Eastern futurism are liberating, given that they ‘articulate a cultural politics of time, a chronography of power’ (42). Parikka brings forth Allahyari’s project *She Who Sees the Unknown* as a valuable example of counterfuturism that addresses contemporary forms of colonialism visually and culturally through her artistic

research (42). In order to have a better understanding of counterfuturism let us have a look at Afrofuturism and its impact.

Thinking in terms of counterfuturisms started with the Afrofuturism movement. The term was coined by Mark Dery in 1993, in the interview entitled 'Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose' (1993). It refers to the production of speculative fictions in relation to Afrodiasporic characters that serve as emancipatory and empowering futures. Dery describes Afrofuturism as the 'African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future' (180). It functions as a disruption of the idea of the future that is engineered and owned by certain elite in the world of technology and gives people the chance to imagine and create their own idea of the future. Therefore, Afrofuturism also challenges the ownership of the future by one certain group of people, similarly to Allahyari's call for plural futures. In his article 'Further Considerations on Afrofuturism' (2003), cultural theorist Kodwo Eshun positions the future and its imagination as an emancipatory, empowering thing. He explains that through prediction and science fiction, the future industry aims to control tomorrow (291). Thus, he points to Afrofuturism as a tool for reclaiming the history of counter-futures and as a space where intervention can take place (301). Even though the scope of this article doesn't cover Afrofuturism or science fiction in-depth, these aims are importantly similar to Allahyari's, as she reclaims stories from the past and revises them to give them a place in the future, intervening in the Western-centric idea of the future and progress.

Parikka argues that Middle Eastern futurisms aim to go beyond 'hegemonic narratives' (qtd. in 54) and that they should be considered 'as active forces that can unhinge existing temporal schemes and complexify already existing regimes of time as forms of power' (44). Therefore, through these futurisms, the power behind imagining and determining the future is transformed and reclaimed by the oppressed, by the people who are denied a place in those ideas and imaginations of the future. Forming and producing these futurisms function as a way of critically engaging and disrupting the Western-centric ideas and imaginations of the future. Therefore, we can conclude that re-figuring is a form of counterfuturism, one that highlights the necessity for the oppressed to critically engage with the past, to create an emancipatory imagination of the future. As this emancipated vision of the future hinges on the capacity to critically engage with the past, Allahyari's artwork offers us a concrete example of how this can be done. She brings the past, present, and future together through re-figuring and shows, ultimately, how they are interrelated in the ways that they affect each other.

CONCLUSION

Re-figuring is a key process in Allahyari's artistic research *She Who Sees the Unknown*, as it is through this that the artist takes control of the representation of these forgotten figures and positions them as necessary and useful figures inside the discussion on contemporary forms of oppression, emphasizing in the process the importance of thinking and creating with figures that come from various backgrounds, especially non-Western ones. Allahyari also positions storytelling as a tool for resistance in her process of re-figuring through performing an intervention in the existing stories and representations of Middle Eastern *jinn*, ultimately reclaiming the ways in which they are represented. Thus, re-figuring is a critical intervention in these specific stories and the way they are told. Through re-figuring, Allahyari demonstrates the relevance of the monster, specifically the female *jinn* from the Middle East, in discussing oppression in the present and future.

Re-figuring stems from Allahyari's call for the necessity for multiple, plural narratives and ideas when discussing important issues, and in this case, the future, and the project itself utilizes this to show us how the creative process can be used as a form of intervention into any certain idea of a future or any (pre)established outcome. It does not necessarily recommend another 'better' outcome, idea, or a way out, but brings attention to the necessity of plurality in this discussion. Counterfuturisms and re-figuring do not simply imagine a different past or future but work through a temporal resistance, wherein they reclaim the stories of the oppressed and underrepresented in the past and present for the future. This creates an empowering act that can be considered an intervention in existing temporalities, as we have seen in the examples of this project outlined above. Allahyari critically engages with such stories and non-human figures in *She Who Sees the Unknown* and, through her concept of re-figuring, produces an example of taking control of one's own story, thus also demonstrating that the oppressed can find emancipation in the future through first revising the past.

Furthermore, through the use of the *jinn*, the project suggests a breaking of the boundaries and binary oppositions that are usually used to talk about oppression and difference. It demonstrates a way of thinking that is relational and complex, bringing forth the figure of the *jinn* as an example of this reframing. In her artistic research project, Allahyari creates a future imaginary that contains monstrous female figures from the Middle East and thus directly intervenes and critically engages with the ideations of a future that is exclusively white, male, or Western. This project thus functions as a form of critical intervention that reclaims the future through the use of what has historically been understood as simply monstrous, and therefore undesirable and rejected. A central question arises from these arguments and reflections on Allahyari's artwork:

why is it fruitful to bring forth stories and figures from non-Western parts of the world in the imagining and the discussion of the future? These new imaginations of the future can serve as a valuable thinking tool in imagining realities in which cultural others *actually* belong, whilst, as we have seen, also serving as a useful tool for the oppressed and underrepresented to reclaim their stories, realities, and futures. Ultimately, through the means examined in this paper, it is clear that this specific case of re-figuring can inspire a broader scale of all kinds of marginalized subjects coming to the fore, which would in turn, in turn, allow for a wider variety of figures, realities, and different kinds of perspectives in the imaginaries of the future.

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¹ The information on *She Who Sees the Unknown* is taken from the project's website, which will be referred to as (Allahyari 2019) in the following sections. The website can be viewed through the following link: <http://shewhoseestheunknown.com/>.

² *Digital colonialism* is a concept that is developed by Allahyari in order to describe the cases where 3D scanning and printing technology are used to recreate a contemporary form of colonial mentality. An example of this is when a Western company or museum embarks on research at an archeological site in the Middle East, wherein archaeologists create 3D scan historical artifacts and do nothing to make this data available to those living in the place of origin of these artifacts. Using 3D scanning and printing

technology to revoke colonialist actions inspired the artist to develop and work with this particular term. In a lecture she gave on this topic at the University of Michigan, Allahyari argues that tools like 3D scanners “are going to mark new areas of colonialism in ways we have not experienced before” (Allahyari 2017). The project resists many aspects of digital colonialism by making this archive publicly available and also simply through the creation of the archive itself.

³ An excerpt of the video depicting the 3D modelling process of Ya’jooj and Ma’jooj can be watched via the following link:
<https://vimeo.com/342063763>.

⁴ The re-appropriation of this story was inspired by Donald Trump’s ‘Muslim ban,’ a U.S. immigration policy restricting access to citizens of several majority Muslim countries, which affected Allahyari personally. In an interview that she gave to *The Creative Independent* in 2017, she explains that she became stuck in Berlin, where she was attending a conference and was unable to reenter the US for ten days (Allahyari 2017). This made her relate to *Ya’Jooj* and *Ma’ Jooj* and see herself as a figure of mischief that would bring chaos to the US. Through this artwork, Allahyari questions the monstrous other, and positions it as a status that needs to be questioned and meditated upon, as it can shift in different contexts.

⁵ A documentation of the ‘She Who Sees the Unkown: Ya’jooj Ma’jooj - VR’ (2018) can be watched through the following link:
<https://vimeo.com/296029355>.