Submersion and Porosity: *Waterphors* and immigration in contemporary French and American political speeches

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to study the conceptualization of IMMIGRATION with the use of *Waterphor*s, namely metaphors that have WATER as a source domain. This work relies on cognitive linguistics and more specifically on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff/ Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2021). The corpus is composed of American and French speeches delivered between 2015 and 2020 by Biden, Clinton, Le Pen, Macron and Trump, for a total of 1,365,504 tokens and 179 IMMIGRATION *Waterphors*. The results show that two categories of *Waterphors* can be distinguished: WATER metaphors that directly conceptualize immigrant as WATER and those that represent the borders as COLANDERS. Regardless of the language, IMMIGRATION metaphors are axiologically negative but Trump and Le Pen tend to push the degree of negativity to its maximum.

Das Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, die Konzeptualisierung von IMMIGRATION unter Verwendung von *Waterphors* zu untersuchen, d.h. Metaphern, deren Ursprungsdomäne WASSER ist. Die Arbeit stützt sich dabei auf die kognitive Linguistik und insbesondere auf die Konzeptuelle Metapherntheorie (Lakoff/Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2021). Das Korpus besteht aus amerikanischen und französischen Reden, die zwischen 2015 und 2020 von Biden, Clinton, Le Pen, Macron und Trump gehalten wurden, mit insgesamt 1.365.504 Tokens und 179 IMMIGRATION-*Waterphors*. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass zwei Kategorien von *Waterphors* unterschieden werden können: Wasser-Metaphern, die Einwanderer direkt als WASSER konzeptualisieren, und solche, die Grenzen als SIEBE darstellen. Unabhängig von der Sprache sind IMMGRATION-Metaphern axiologisch negativ, Trump und Le Pen neigen jedoch dazu, den Grad der Negativität auf ein Maximum zu steigern.

1. Introduction

Wave, *Submersion*, *Tide*. No, these nouns have not been taken from a weather forecast but are metaphorically used by politicians to refer to human beings: immigrants. Many linguists, Santa Ana (2002), Corbin (2005), Charteris-Black (2006), Cunningham-Parmeter (2011), Taylor (2022), to name a few, have shown that *Waterphors*, namely the use of WATER as a source domain, are indeed very frequent to talk about IMMIGRATION. They have mostly demonstrated that these metaphors are largely negative and that they usually enable the speaker to emphasize the supposed "uncontrollable" dimension of migratory phenomena. For instance, Porto (2022: 252) showed the frequent use of *flow* to refer to Syrian refugees is "negatively charged" and "could have affected public opinion on the event" of the Syrian migration into Europe in 2015.

With the help of a corpus of 1,365,504 tokens, the main objective of this study is to show that *Waterphors* are part of a larger process that tends to dehumanize immigrants (see Hart 2021: 226), on the one hand, and to criticize lenient immigration policies, on the other hand, for instance with the concept of "porous borders" described by Nguyen and McCallum (2016: 167). *Waterphors* are not only used to conceptualize immigrants but also all the participants of immigration: the host country, the means of transportation or the borders. In the context of the war in Syria that led many people to leave their countries, as well as the 2016 election of Donald Trump, who promised to build a wall at the border with Mexico. The corpus under study is constituted of immigration-related speeches delivered by the top-two presidential candidates in France and in the United States between 2015 and 2020: namely, Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, Marine Le Pen, Emmanuel Macron and Donald Trump. The main research questions that underlie these analyses are the following ones: *how is immigration metaphorically conceptualized in terms of water in contemporary political discourse and how does the context impact the source domain?*

So as to answer these questions, I will firstly introduce the theoretical framework I relied on. I will particularly present the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the notions of axiology and semantic prosody as well as an overview of the literature concerning the relationship between WATER and IMMIGRATION. Then, I will describe the methodology I followed to select the corpus and identify WATER metaphors. Finally, I will present and discuss the results and demonstrate that two categories of *Waterphors* coexist in the corpus: metaphors that conceptualize immigrants as a wave and metaphors that compare the borders to colanders.

2. *Waterphors* and Immigration: theoretical framework

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Axiology and Semantic Prosody

The theoretical framework I relied on for this study is the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) described by Lakoff/Johnson in 1980 in their book *Metaphors We Live By*. It is based on the fact that human beings do not only speak metaphorically but that they conceptualize the world they live in with metaphors: "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff/Johnson 1980: 3). For instance, other linguists such as Kövecses (2002: xi) even went further saying

that "[t]rying to understand metaphor, then, means attempting to understand a vital part of who we are and what kind of world we live in". Thus, trying to understand IMMIGRATION *Waterphors* means attempting to understand how immigrants are conceptualized in society.

Conceptual metaphors are always schematized as CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN A is CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN B. In the case of IMMIGRATION *Waterphors*, conceptual domain A is IMMIGRANTS while conceptual domain B is WATER.

One of the main principles of CMT, which is essential when studying IMMIGRATION metaphors, is the *highlighting-hiding principle*: when the speaker uses a metaphor, they automatically underline some parts of reality while hiding others. Kövecses (2002: 79) writes:

> When a source domain is applied to a target, only some (but not all) aspects of the target are brought into focus.
>
> [...]
>
> When a metaphor focuses on one or some aspects of a target concept, we can say that it highlights that or those aspect(s).
>
> [...]
>
> Highlighting necessarily goes together with hiding. This means that when a concept has several aspects (which is normally the case) and the metaphor focuses on one (or maybe two or three) aspect(s), the other aspects of the concept will remain hidden, that is, out of focus. Highlighting and hiding presuppose each other.

In the case of IMMIGRATION metaphors, the *highlighting-hiding* principle will tend to conceal the vulnerability of immigrants and their individuality while it will usually focus on quantity.[1] This phenomenon echoes Tournier's (2004: 137) idea that metaphors are always based on the *perception* of similarities between two domains. Kövecses (2002: 82) writes that "[the] suggestion that some metaphors are characterized by perceived similarities has an interesting implication. It implies that some metaphors are not based on similarity but generate similarities".

[1] However, it should be noted that between February and May 2022, Koller (2024: 81) has shown that "Ukrainian refugees are increasingly identified and nominated, signalling a shift towards a more personal representation".

The invention of these similarities between WATER and IMMIGRATION are particularly problematic since they can nurture existing discriminations and anti-immigrant ideologies. As Deignan (2010: 357) explains: "in the Conceptual Metaphor Theory literature, it is widely agreed that metaphor is evaluative, persuasive and therefore potentially ideological".

The evaluative dimension of metaphors is strongly related to their axiology. Axiology consists in the study of "value" (Zerkina/Lomakina/Kostina 2015: 257). Thus, studying the axiology of IMMIGRATION metaphors is studying the (positive or negative) values that are given to immigration by the speaker since metaphors are never neutral because of their "intrinsic evaluative potential" (Taylor 2022: 4). The literature has demonstrated that the inherent "evaluative potential" (Taylor 2022: 4) of IMMIGRATION metaphors is mostly negative. However, some linguists have also shown that it could sometimes be positive, especially when immigrants are conceptualized as builders (Taylor 2020: 26) or when metaphors are related to the economy (Salahshour 2016: 77). The objective of this article is to determine whether the axiological potential of *Waterphors* that are used to conceptualize IMMIGRATION is negative or positive in French and American speeches.

However, the axiological dimension of a metaphor cannot be determined without its context and more particularly without considering the phenomenon of semantic prosody. The notion of semantic prosody echoes Firth's (1957), Turner's (1998) or Sinclair's (2004) theories according to which it is impossible to understand the meaning of a word without looking at its environment. Louw (1993: 157) defined semantic prosody as "a consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates".

McEnery/Hardie (2012: 136) explain that "words or phrases are said to have negative or positive semantic prosody if they typically co-occur with units that have a negative or positive meaning". Thus, if immigration-related terms typically co-occur with negatively connoted metaphors, they will themselves acquire a negative meaning.

Salahshour (2016) made the link between semantic prosody and IMMIGRATION *Waterphors* unequivocally:

> [e]xtending the concept of semantic prosody to immigration, it can be argued that the frequent co-occurrence of words such as "migrants" or "refugees" with liquid metaphors like flood can lead to the construction of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants as a threat which needs to be contained.

The concept of semantic prosody was thus used to analyze the corpus. Nevertheless, before applying that notion to the corpora, let us give an overview of the existing literature on the *Waterphors* that are used to talk about IMMIGRATION.

2.2 IMMIGRATION as WATER: literature review

The source domain that is first referred to in the studies on IMMIGRATION metaphors is that of natural catastrophes and more particularly that related to water: "Disaster metaphors have an important history in political communication on the topic of immigration" (Charteris-Black 2006: 14). As Bernardot (2016: 28) points out, immigration metaphors that refer to liquids are more significant than others:

> L'établissement d'un lien entre mouvements humains et mécaniques des fluides est initié par des théoriciens et des leaders d'opinion au cours du xix^{e} siècle. Ce n'est pas le seul registre d'association mobilisé. Les analogies avec les épidémies et les espèces invasives ou les animalisations racistes et les images sexualisées et genrées sont fréquentes. Cependant la métaphore liquide s'est imposée progressivement comme une matrice discursive et conceptuelle dominante et elle aspire dorénavant les autres registres analogiques dans son système de signification.[2]

Metaphors that compare immigrants to water elements include three separate features of IMMIGRATION: direction, quantity, and strength (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011). Santa Ana (2002: 76) also indicates that WATER metaphors presuppose three elements: firstly, migrants are reduced to an undifferentiated non-human aggregate. Then, this aggregate moves from one container to

[2] (EN): "The link between human movement and fluid mechanics was first established by theorists and opinion leaders in the 19th century. This was not the only register of association mobilized. Analogies with epidemics and invasive species, racist animalisations and sexualized, gendered images are frequent. However, the liquid metaphor has gradually established itself as a dominant discursive and conceptual matrix, and now sucks other analogical registers into its system of meaning."

another and thus releases energy. Finally, the movement is powerful and thus dangerous. Most of the time, these metaphors describe overpowering water in terms of "stream", "tide", "flow", "wave". Cunningham-Parmeter (2011: 1580) adds that this kind of metaphor refers to "great floods [that] have devastated societies throughout human history". Therefore, metaphors related to water can be defined as cultural because they rely on shared knowledge and history: France and the United States are both surrounded by seas and oceans and immigrants usually have to cross those stretches of water to reach the coasts of the host nation. This applies even if it is, of course, more palpable for immigrants who came to France after the Syrian conflict, compared to immigrants from Mexico to the US, who come by land.

Nevertheless, the WATER source domain is not used in the Western world only; for example, Chinese journalists frequently refer to immigrants in terms of "great floods" (dachao) or "waves" (langchao) (Bernardot 2016: 33), which demonstrates the universal dimension of this metaphor. However, it should be noted that the paradoxical dimension of water – purifying and dangerous at the same time – can also be found in Chinese (Granet 1980). One explanation could be that these metaphors also act as metonymies, as they not only refer to directions and power but also to the way by which immigrants arrive. It is perhaps for that reason that WATER metaphors are particularly productive since water is the element travelled, at least for people who literally cross the Mediterranean and historically for migrants crossing the Atlantic by ship. Bernardot (2016) points out a contradiction: even though contemporary migrations are essentially made by plane or on the ground, liquid and maritime metaphors remain omnipresent. According to Charteris-Black (2006: 570), this omnipresence could be due to the fact that flooding "has become a more familiar experience, probably as a result of climate change". These metaphors are not only linguistic but also visual and they usually focus on universal images such as tempests, shipwrecks, drifts or bodies overboard (Corbin 2005: 10–15). To understand the significance of the conceptual metaphor IMMIGRANTS ARE WATER, let us represent some of the different linguistic forms it can take in Figure **1**.

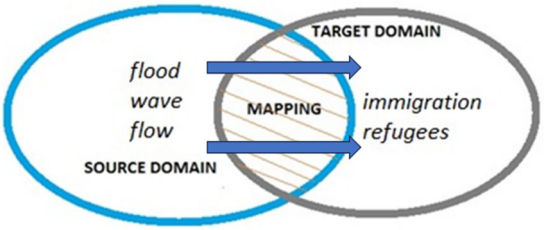

Figure 1: Representation of the conceptual metaphor: immigrants are water

With the use of such a source domain, the goal of politicians is often to emphasise the uncontrollable aspects of immigration. Santa Ana (1997: 323–324) describes the mapping of the conceptual metaphor immigration is dangerous waters as follows:

> a. Immigration corresponds to moving waters.
>
> b. The United States corresponds to a bounded land subject to change from floods.
>
> c. Greater immigration corresponds to an increased threat to the land.
>
> d. The land's vulnerability to flooding corresponds to U.S. susceptibility to cultural change.

Furthermore, this metaphorization of migrants as having a liquid form is often considered dehumanizing (Bernardot 2016). Van Der Valk (2003: 331), who studied French right-wing parliamentary discourse, draws the following conclusion: water metaphors symbolize "a loss of control over immigration. Too many immigrants enter the country. We lost control over the process." In addition, Cunningham-Parmeter (2011: 1580) explains that immigration demographics "do not bear out" the implications of conceptual metaphors such as IMMIGRATION IS A FLOOD: a strong majority of immigrants do not "gush into the country as the flood metaphor suggests", but instead enter the country legally.

The semantic field of water to characterise immigration is omnipresent in the corpus and especially in the speeches of Marine Le Pen and Donald Trump with terms such as "flux", "vague" or "flots" in French and "wave", "pour", "flow" or "flood" in English, as can be seen in the following examples from the corpus:

> (1) Certains pays, non soumis comme le nôtre à l'idéologie mortifère de l'ouverture totale des frontières et de la libre-circulation, ont

réussi à ***endiguer les flots d'immigrants*** arrivant notamment par la mer[3] (Le Pen, Speech, 2015).

(2) We've all seen on television, all over the papers, the illegal migrants ***pouring up*** through Mexico, flooding the border—many from Central America, Honduras—all over the place, coming up by the thousands. We're stopping them at different fronts, but we don't have laws. We have laws that were written by people that truly could not love our country (Trump, Speech, 2018) .

In their study about American newspapers, The *Vera Institute of Justice*[4] showed that terms such as *flood*, *surge* or *wave* conceptualised Latin immigrant children "as a chaotic, overwhelming, and uncontrollable force that must be stopped". Besides, not only are migrants conceptualized in terms of water but borders are now usually defined in terms of permeability (Razac 2013) and the example of "porous borders" is often given (Santa Ana 1997: 322). This idea was also developed by Cunningham-Parmeter (2011: 1581): "Just as levies attempt to hold back large bodies of water, the border is presented as a fragile dike that might burst at any moment, given the pressure coming from the alien flood." Moreover, the expansion of this source domain is shown by the fact that these images are not only used in discourse advocating safety policies but also in pro-immigration discourse (Bernardot 2016), which can be surprising and which will be studied further in the corpus analysis.

Finally, Bernardot (2016: 36) insists on the idea that using expressions such as "flows of immigrants" can easily generate other derogatory source domains such as diseases or criminality:

> Les flots de migrants peuvent être scénarisés au choix comme une souillure de l'eau, une maladie qui se répand, un désastre naturel

[3] (EN): "Some countries, not subject as we are to the deadly ideology of totally open borders and free movement, have managed to stem the flow of immigrants arriving by sea in particular."

[4] https://www.vera.org/news/no-person-is-illegal-the-language-we-use-for-immigration-matters (12.09.2025).

> comme la rupture d'une digue et une infiltration criminelle potentiellement terroriste.[5]

Moreover, Charteris-Black (2006: 572) suggests that

> conceptually, metaphors referring to liquids are preferred because of the knowledge that, by their nature, liquids – tides, rivers, waves etc. – move around; they can therefore be related to a more primary conceptual metaphor: changes are movements.

He adds (2006: 573) that "from a right-wing perspective, the past is nearly always better than the present and therefore immigration is conceptualized as a disaster because it causes change". Moreover, even if characterizing "the movement of people as moving water might seem quite natural, even appropriate", "it must be emphasized that such a construction of people's movement is *not* the only possible metaphor" (Santa Ana 1997: 321). This is why other source domains, such as CONTAINER, are also frequent.

3. Methodology: corpus selection and Metaphor Identification Procedure

The corpus contains speeches that were delivered by American and French presidential candidates between 2015 and 2020. 2015 corresponds to the year when Donald Trump announced that he was running for president for the first time while 2020 corresponds to the year of his defeat against Joe Biden.

However, only the speeches delivered by the top two candidates in presidential elections in each country during this period of time were selected. As a result, the corpus under study is composed of speeches pronounced by Trump, Clinton, Biden, Macron and Le Pen. The transcripts of the speeches were collected from institutional or academic websites.

So as to have a thematic coherence and to make sure that some IMMIGRATION *Waterphors* could be identified, only transcripts that contained at least one immigration-related term (such as *immigration*, *undocumented*, *asylum* or *deport*) were collected. Finally, the corpus is composed of 5 sub-corpora: 41 speeches (211 382 tokens) by Le Pen, 14 speeches (79 742 tokens) by Macron, 241 speeches (846 473 tokens) by Trump, 27 speeches (46 517 tokens) by Biden and 58

[5] (EN): "The flood of migrants can be scripted as a water contamination, a spreading disease, a natural disaster such as the breaking of a dike, or a potentially terrorist criminal infiltration."

speeches (181 390 tokens) by Hillary Clinton. Before identifying the metaphors, each speech was labelled as follows: (Politician, Medium, Date).

After the selection and collection of the corpus, the WATER metaphors were manually identified according to the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). Described as "an explicit, reliable, and flexible method for identifying metaphorically used words in spoken and written language" (Pragglejaz Group 2007: 2), MIP is now a widely accepted standard in metaphor research. As explained by Semino et al. (2018: 5), an expression can be regarded as a metaphorical occurrence if "(a) its 'contextual meaning' contrasts with a 'basic meaning' that is more physical and concrete (although not necessarily more frequent) and (b) where the contextual meaning can be understood via comparison with the basic meaning". For instance, in the case of IMMIGRATION *Waterphors*, WATER is the "physical"/ "concrete"/ "basic" meaning (Semino et al. 2018: 5) and contrasts with the "contextual meaning" which is often related to economy, health, unemployment, asylum, etc., but which has no link with water.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 General Results

A total of 179 *Waterphors* related to immigration were found in the corpus, with 5 metaphorical occurrences for Biden, 12 for Macron, 1 for Clinton, 60 for Le Pen and 101 for Trump. Table 1 shows the number of occurrences of *Waterphors* for each politician of the corpus with their relative frequencies per ten thousand words.

	Biden	**Clinton**	**Le Pen**	**Macron**	**Trump**
Number of occurrences	5	1	60	12	101
Relative frequencies in ‰	0.107‰	0.006‰	0.284‰	0.150‰	0.119‰

Table 1: Number of *Waterphors* per politician

The purpose of this part is to show the characteristics of the *Waterphors* that are used to talk about immigration, depending on the language and the politician. The objective is not to present a quantitative analysis but rather to show how

immigration is metaphorically conceptualized in terms of water in contemporary political discourse in France and the US. Thus, another aim will be to illustrate how the context impacts on the source domain. In order to do so, different examples will be detailed.

As demonstrated in section 2.2, WATER metaphors are omnipresent in discourse about immigration, in many different languages. They have a "long-standing history of use in relation to discussion of migration and migrants" and are particularly remarkable as they can be creative and conventionalized at the same time (Taylor 2022). Table 2 displays the different linguistic occurrences of *Waterphors*, which are used by each political figure to conceptualize migrants and/or migration in the corpus.

Politician	**liquid linguistic occurrences**
Clinton	*Flood* (1)
Biden	*Flood* (1), *flow* (1), *overwhelm*[6] (1), *source* (1), *wave* (1)
Macron	*Débord** (2), *endiguer* (2), **flux* (5), *gonfler* (1), *submergés* (1), *vagues* (1)
Le Pen	*Afflu** (3), *déferl** (5), *dilution* (1), *dissolution* (1), *filtrer* (3), *flot** (3), **flux* (9), *infiltr** (3), *noyer** (2), *passoire.s* (2), *porosité* (1), *submer** (18), *tarie* (1), *torrent* (2), *vague** (5), *vannes* (1)
Trump	*Absorb* (1), *drain* (6), **flow** (17), *flood** (16), **flux* (3), *infiltrating* (1), *overwhelm** (14), *porous* (1), *pour**(37), *spilling* (1), *surge* (1), *wave** (2)

Table 2: Different linguistic forms of WATER metaphors according to the political figure[7]

[6] Even though the metaphoricity of "overwhelm" can be discussed, I have decided to consider it a lexicalized metaphor since "whelm" comes from Middle English *whelmen*, meaning "to submerge completely", https://www.etymonline.com/word/overwhelm (06.11.2024).

[7] The lemmas correspond to:
Débordements / debordé
Flux / afflux / reflux
Déferlante / déferler / déferle
Flot / flots
Infiltrer / infiltration
Noyé / noie
Submersion / submergé.s / submergée.s / submerger

Two different categories of *Waterphors* could be identified and will be described. Firstly, metaphors that include the notion of submersion by directly representing immigrants as water and then 'indirect' *Waterphors*, namely metaphors that do not directly refer to immigrants, and the notion of porosity will be developed.

4.2 From *flux* to *submersion*: a gradation phenomenon

The movement of water can be sudden or gradual. In the corpus, Trump and Le Pen tend to use more terms that refer to suddenness (*surge, wave, déferler*) than their political opponents, who tend to prefer terms that encode a continuous movement (*flux*). Other differences concern the magnitude and direction of the movement as well as the axiology of the metaphorical context. The magnitude of the movement described by Le Pen and Trump is stronger and more violent than that used by their opponents (for instance with *submersion* instead of *flux*). In addition, the migratory movement described by Macron, Biden and Clinton is usually a horizontal one while Le Pen and Trump also resort to terms referring to a downward movement (*flow, flux, wave* vs. *submersion, overwhelm, pour*). The following examples will underline these results:

(3) Whether it was my ancestors who boarded *coffin ships* in the Irish sea in the famine in the 1840s, or families who fled oppressive regimes and natural disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean, or any of the ***waves of immigrants*** seeking freedom and opportunity and who have continuously renewed our national strength, and have given us the great capacity to speak – to speak with grit and determination, to simply say, "I can do it." All of our ancestors, yours and mine, they came equipped with only one thing — the only thing they had in their pocket was hope. In so many ways, that's part of what makes us Americans (Biden, Speech, 2020).

Flow / flows / flowing / inflow
Flood / floodgates / flooded / flooding / floods
Flux / influx
Overwhelm / overwhelmingly / overwhelmed / overwhelming
Pour / pouring / pours.

(4) La difficulté qui est la nôtre aujourd'hui, c'est que nous sommes face à un phénomène qui est nouveau, qui est nouveau depuis l'élection. C'est que, en Europe, ***les flux d'entrée*** n'ont jamais été aussi bas depuis 5 ans et en France les demandes d'asile n'ont jamais été aussi hautes, sur cette période. Et ça nous devons le regarder en face. J'ai défendu et je continuerai toujours à défendre le droit d'asile, j'y crois très profondément, ça fait partie de nos valeurs et nous avons face à nous une formation politique qui veut le supprimer, le fragiliser, le découdre. Mais je constate que le droit d'asile aujourd'hui est détourné de sa finalité par des réseaux, des gens qui manipulent, et est le théâtre de distorsions[8] (Macron, Speech, 2019).

Although Biden and Macron use inherently dehumanizing metaphors, in examples (3) and (4) with *waves* and *flux*, respectively, the analysis of the surrounding context shows that these metaphorical terms are not necessarily negative. In excerpt (3), the water metaphor is associated with the positively connoted notions of *freedom* and *opportunity* as well as those of *strength*, *determination* and *hope*. In the cotext to the left of the metaphor, Biden depicts the difficulties immigrants endure and identifies with them with the use of the possessive pronoun *my* in *my ancestors* to then show all the helpful contributions immigrants have made to the country. Thus, the whole excerpt has a rather positive axiology concerning immigration.

The same phenomenon can be noticed in example (4). In the cotext to the right, Macron repeats the lemma defend* (*défendu*, *défendre*) and shows that he is willing to protect asylum seekers. However, this is not always the case and there are some examples where the axiology associated with the cotext is rather negative, even for politicians who are not considered nationalists, as can be seen in excerpt (5):

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[8] (EN): "The difficulty we're facing today is that we're dealing with a new phenomenon, a new phenomenon since the election. In Europe, inflows have never been so low over the last 5 years, while in France, asylum applications have never been so high over the same period. And that's something we have to face up to. I have always defended and will continue to defend the right of asylum, I believe in it very deeply, it's part of our values, and we're up against a political group that wants to abolish it, weaken it, tear it apart. But I can see that the right of asylum today is being hijacked by networks, by people who manipulate, and is the scene of distortions."

(5) Il faut créer une Europe qui protège en se dotant d'une vraie politique de défense et de sécurité commune. Il faut être plus efficace face aux grandes migrations en réformant profondément le système de protection de nos frontières, la politique migratoire et le droit d'asile. Le système actuel fait porter à quelques-uns toute la **charge** et ne pourra pas résister aux prochaines ***vagues migratoires***. Je crois à une Europe qui se dote de moyens pour protéger ses frontières extérieures, assurer sa sécurité à travers la coopération policière et judiciaire dans sa lutte contre le terrorisme, déployer une organisation commune en matière de droit d'asile et d'immigration, une Europe qui protège contre les dérèglements de la mondialisation[9] (Macron, Speech, 2017).

In this example, the metaphorical occurrence *vague migratoire*, which is inherently dehumanizing but rather conventionalized, is accompanying terms that are linked to the semantic field of *protection* (*défense, sécurité, protection, protéger, protège*), which implies immigration is dangerous. Furthermore, the conceptual metaphor IMMIGRANTS ARE WATER is combined with IMMIGRATION IS A BURDEN, with the use of the noun *charge*, which also encodes a negative axiology.

This strategy, which consists in using a term referring to a horizontal water movement, from point A to point B, combined with a negative axiology, can also be found in Trump's and Le Pen's speeches with even more negatively connoted terms in the cotext. For instance, in example (6), Trump explains that he wants to put an end to immigration; he uses two verbs (*stop* and *halt*) that encode a terminative aspect, justifying his anti-immigration policies. Besides, the metaphor of the *flow* is combined with negative terms, such as *threat* or *emergency*, as well as with the notion of violation (*intrusion*).

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[9] (EN): "We need to create a Europe that protects, with a genuine common defense and security policy. We need to be more effective in the face of mass migration, by radically reforming our border protection system, migration policy and asylum law. The current system places all the burden on a few, and will not be able to withstand the next waves of migration. I believe in a Europe that equips itself with the means to protect its external borders, ensure its security through police and judicial cooperation in the fight against terrorism, deploy a common organization for asylum and immigration, a Europe that protects against the disruptions of globalization."

(6) Mexico's passive cooperation in allowing this **mass incursion** constitutes an emergency and extraordinary threat to the national security and economy of the United States. Mexico has very strong immigration laws and could easily halt the ***illegal flow of migrants***, including by returning them to their home countries. Additionally, Mexico could quickly and easily stop illegal aliens from coming through its southern border with Guatemala (Trump, Speech, 2019).

All these associations contribute to providing a very negative evaluation of immigration, which is also the case in Le Pen's discourse:

(7) Ces ***vagues humaines de clandestins*** ne datent pas d'hier. En 2011 déjà, j'étais allée à Lampedusa pour alerter l'opinion publique sur ce qui m'apparaissait alors comme les prémices d'un grave danger. Une fois de plus nous avons été tristement visionnaires, mais hélas, aucun de nos lâches dirigeants ne nous a écoutés[10] (Le Pen, Speech, 2015).

In example (7), the cotext to the right of *vagues* clearly shows a negative axiology. It is associated with the verb *alerter* and the noun *danger*, which is modified by the adjective *grave*, as well as to the adverbs *tristement* and *hélas*. Finally, the adjective *lâches*, which modifies the noun *dirigeants*, indicates that Le Pen blames the government for acting cowardly and not having listened to her political party.

The terms *flux, flot, flow, wave, vague* are used by all the politicians and their evaluative dimension depends on the axiology of the cotext. In other words, it depends on whether the speaker wants to express nationalist ideas or not. These terms are inherently dehumanizing: they emphasize the notions of direction, proportion, and strength (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011: 1580) while completely erasing the vulnerability and individuality of migrants. They are described by an entity that is continuous rather than discrete. Nevertheless, these meta-phorical occurrences depict ordinary rather than disastrous as well as

[10] (EN): "These human waves of illegal immigrants are nothing new. Back in 2011, I went to Lampedusa to alert public opinion to what seemed to me at the time to be the beginnings of a grave danger. Once again, we were sadly visionary, but alas, none of our cowardly leaders listened to us."

horizontal movements of liquids, while the most salient difference is that Le Pen and Trump predominantly use occurrences that refer to violent (*déferl*, surge*, etc.) and/or vertical (*overwhelm**, *submer**, *pour**) movements of water. As shown in Table 2, *submer** is the most frequent *Waterphor* in Le Pen's speeches, with 18 occurrences, as illustrated in (8) and (9):

(8) Communautarisme, droit du Travail éclaté, domination de l'économie par les grands groupes, inégalités dans l'accès aux services publics, soumission aux oligarchies, ***submersion migratoire***, la disparition des communes privées de leurs ressources fiscales, le pays que veut Monsieur Macron n'est plus la France. Ce n'est d'ailleurs plus un pays, c'est un espace, un terrain vague, une salle de marchés où il n'y a plus que des consommateurs et des producteurs, ce n'est plus une nation mais une société multiculturelle éclatée[11] (Le Pen, Speech, 2017).

(9) Or ces cultures si flamboyantes sont attaquées par le haut avec l'uniformisation forcée, et par le bas par le multiculturalisme lié à *l'**immigration-submersion***[12] (Le Pen, Speech, 2019).

Meanwhile, *pour** is the most frequent *Waterphor* in Trump's speeches, with 37 occurrences, as can be seen in (10) and (11):

(10) We're going to suspend immigration from terror-prone regions where vetting cannot safely occur. And if you look at Syria and the migration, we're taking in thousands and thousands of people into our country. We have no idea who they are, what their thought process is, where they come from and Hillary Clinton wants to increase the number of those thousands and thousands currently ***pouring*** by 550%. Radical, Islamic terror is

[11] (EN): "Communitarianism, dismantled labor laws, domination of the economy by large corporations, unequal access to public services, submission to oligarchies, migratory submergence, the disappearance of communes deprived of their tax resources - the country Monsieur Macron wants is no longer France. It's no longer a country, it's a space, a wasteland, a trading floor where there are only consumers and producer."

[12] (EN): "But these flamboyant cultures are being attacked from above by forced standardization, and from below by multiculturalism linked to immigration-submersion".

right around the corner. We have to be so tough, so smart, so vigilant (Trump, Speech, 2016).

(11) A vote for House Democrats is truly a vote for open borders, people ***pouring*** into our country, ***pouring*** in (Trump, Speech, 2018).

In excerpt (8), Le Pen's point is to show France is not France anymore. She uses negatively connoted terms, such as *domination*, *soumission* or *disparition*, which are associated with the metaphor *submersion migratoire* so as to justify her anti-immigration ideas. In example (9), she goes further and creates the compound *immigration-submersion*. The use of this compound is telling since it shows that the politician associates the two nouns with even more strength than with the structure [NOUN + ADJ], as it becomes one entity. The existence of such a neologism in her discourse is a prototypical linguistic transcription of the cognitive fusion she makes between immigration and natural catastrophe. The source and the target domain are reunited in one linguistic entity: the conceptual metaphor IMMIGRATION IS WATER does not even work here since immigration = water and water = immigration. It is a bidirectional metaphor. Furthermore, the definition of submersion is axiologically negative and implies suffering that leads to death. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED)*, it refers to "the action or an act of submerging something; the state or condition of being submerged; suffocation; drowning; immersion; inundation" (online version). Besides, the noun *submersion*[13] is itself composed of a prefix and a root that both encode a downward movement. The prefix *sub-* means *under* and the Proto-Indo-European root °*merg* means *plunge* or *sink*. With *submersion*, the water metaphor, which is inherently negative and dehumanizing, is reinforced by another one: the conceptual metaphor DOWN IS BAD (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Moreover, the noun comes from Latin *submergere,* which metaphorically means *erase*. The notion of erasure is an idea that also appears through water metaphors in Le Pen's discourse and which is related to the conspiracy theory of the so-called 'grand remplacement', which has particularly been developed by the far-right author Renaud Camus and that emerged in 2010, but was born in the 19th century. This belief consists in saying that Europeans are going to be

[13] *Etymonline:* https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=submerge&ref=searchbar_searchhint (06.11.2024).

"replaced" by immigrants who mainly come from Africa. It is usually linked to far-right and xenophobic ideologies and is expressed by water metaphors with terms such as *dissolution* or *dilution* in Le Pen's discourse, as illustrated by the two following excerpts:

(12) Ce sont ces organisations de toute origine et de toute nature, qui font si bien le jeu des trafiquants en appelant à l'ouverture des frontières, à l'accueil des réfugiés, à la ***dissolution des pe*uples** et des cultures dans un grand tout indifférencié ![14] (Le Pen, Speech, 2017).

(13) Ce traité qu'Emmanuel Macron s'apprête à signer comme celui de Marrakech qu'il a approuvé de manière clandestine et honteuse constituent l'illustration de son projet pour l'Europe : un projet qui fait disparaître le peuple français par ***la dilution migratoire*** qu'il organise, un projet qui entérine la sortie de la France de l'histoire[15] (Le Pen, Speech, 2019).

If we look at the semantic prosody (*honteuse*, *disparaître*, etc.) in the two examples, the water metaphors, combined with a negative axiology, enable Le Pen to refer to the notion of dilution, and thus of deletion, with the use of migrants as water. According to her, the French population is diluted with immigrants, which means that the French culture is erased by immigrants. Furthermore, the process of dilution also implies the dangerous idea of "purity": one usually adds water to a product to make it less pure and weaker. This is suggested by the definition of dilution in the *OED*: "The action of diluting; a making thin, fluid, or weaker by the admixture of water or other reducing substance; watering down" (online version).

In the American corpus, the most frequent water metaphorical occurrence is *pour** (37 occurrences), which is only used by Trump. *Pour** is similar to *submer**

[14] (EN): "It is these organizations, of all origins and of all kinds, that play so well into the hands of the traffickers by calling for open borders, the welcoming of refugees, the dissolution of peoples and cultures into a great undifferentiated whole!"

[15] (EN): "The treaty that Emmanuel Macron is about to sign, like the Marrakech treaty that he approved in a clandestine and shameful manner, is an illustration of his project for Europe: a project that makes the French people disappear through the migratory dilution it organizes, a project that ratifies France's exit from history."

in the sense that it also encodes a downward movement, relying once again on the conceptual orientational metaphor DOWN IS BAD.

(14) And the Democrats want radical socialism, and they want open borders ***where everybody pours into*** our country (Trump, Speech, 2018).

In excerpt (14) *pour*, and its combination with the pronoun *everybody*, highlights the uncontrollable dimension of immigration. Indeed, if it is possible to stop water coming from the ocean or a river by building a dam or a ditch, it becomes almost impossible to stop water coming directly from above (Lafiandra 2018). *Submer** and *pour** therefore work following the same negative axiology: they both encode too large a quantity of water (contrary to *wave* or *flow*) and refer to a downward movement. The use of the lemma *submer** in French can also be compared to that of *overwhelm** in English, which is used by Trump. According to the *OED*, *overwhelm* means "to bury or drown beneath a mass of earth, water, etc.; to submerge completely; to destroy or obliterate by covering with something" (online version). Thus, the definition is axiologically negative as it refers to destruction. According to *Etymonline*, the prefix *over-* comes from Old English *ofer* and means *above*; *too much*; *higher*, etc. and as *whelm* comes from Middle English *whelmen* "to turn upside down". In the corpus, Trump uses *overwhelm** to criticize the Democratic Party's view on immigration. He blames them for opening the borders, as illustrated in excerpt (15):

(15) But we're going to call it the Democrat Party. And it's **openly inviting millions of illegal aliens** to break our laws, violate our borders, and ***overwhelm our nation***. The Democrats want caravans. They like the caravans. A lot of people say, "I wonder who started that caravan?" (Trump, Speech, 2018).

This strategy is similar to the strategy Trump uses with *flood**, which is often used as a verb and the Democrats as subject of this verb, as in the following typical example:

(16) **Democrats** want to open borders, which equals massive crime. **Republicans** want strong borders, and we want no crime. We don't want crime. **Democrats** support sanctuary cities, cities of crime. **They'll *flood our streets* with criminal aliens** and violent gangs. **Republicans** believe that our country

> should be a sanctuary for law-abiding Americans, not criminal aliens (Trump, Speech, 2018).

Excerpt (16) illustrates the hyperpolarization that characterizes the American political system. Trump emphasizes the dichotomy between Democrats and Republicans, associating Democrats with criminal aliens and accusing them of being the origin of a migratory *flood*. Furthermore, Trump alternatively starts each sentence with *Democrats* or *Republicans* and then opposes each notion with its negative form (crime vs. no crime), thus emphasizing the dichotomy *us* (Republicans) vs. *them* (Democrats).

If the notion of "critical point", which is described by Charteris-Black (2006: 578) for CONTAINER metaphors, is applied to WATER metaphors, the analysis of the corpus demonstrates that nationalist politicians (Le Pen/Trump) not only refer to the critical point but to it being exceeded, concerning both magnitude and directions. On the one hand, the water used by Trump and Le Pen to conceptualize migrants is multidirectional (it can also come from above) and often encodes an abnormal flux. On the other hand, Biden, Clinton and Macron mainly resort to unidirectional (only horizontal) water movements with terms that refer to usual movement (*flow*, *wave*, etc.).

Besides, Trump and Le Pen tend to extend the metaphors they use, as illustrated by the two following examples:

> (17) La ***submersion*** programmée de notre continent par les migrants est une atteinte à l'intégrité de nos pays, à leur stabilité, à leur sécurité. Ces gigantesques ***vagues*** de migrants que l'Union Européenne laisse ***déferler*** sur nos côtes, ces millions de migrants que l'UE installe chez nous, dans nos villes et même dans nos villages les plus reculés, cette politique irresponsable scelle la disparition de l'Europe si nous ne l'arrêtons pas[16] (Le Pen, Speech, 2018).

[16] (EN): "The planned flooding of our continent by migrants is an attack on the integrity, stability and security of our countries. These gigantic waves of migrants that the European Union is letting break on our coasts, these millions of migrants that the EU is installing in our homes, in our cities and even in our most remote villages, this irresponsible policy is sealing Europe's demise if we don't stop it."

(18) The ***flow*** of illegal aliens is crashing our immigration system and ***overwhelming*** our country (Trump, Speech, 2019).

In excerpt (17), Le Pen uses the metaphorical occurrence of *submersion* and then extends this water metaphor with the noun *vagues*, in the plural form, and then the verb *déferler*. In excerpt (18), Trump starts by using *flow* and then extends it with *overwhelm*. In both examples, the extended metaphors reinforce the negative axiology of the excerpt, which is emphasized by the negatively connoted terms that surround the metaphors (*atteinte, irresponsable, disparition, crashing*, etc.).

Sometimes, Le Pen and Trump do not extend the water metaphor with the same source domain but use another metaphor, with a different source domain, which is combined with the first one. For instance, BURDEN and WATER are domains that often go together in the corpus. The following example underlines this:

(19) La réalité, peu médiatisée, c'est que les propos irresponsables du chef de l'Etat en matière d'immigration ont eu pour conséquence, en quelques jours, un ***afflux*** **massif** de migrants notamment dans le Calaisis[17] (Le Pen, Speech, 2018).

The metaphorical occurrence *afflux massif* enables Le Pen to combine two different conceptual metaphors: IMMIGRANTS ARE WATER (*afflux*) and IMMIGRATION IS A BURDEN (with the adjective *massif*).[18] Besides, the phrase 'afflux massif' is contradictory, because it combines two different states (liquid and solid).

These metaphors directly describe immigrants with *Waterphor*, with a gradation process. This leads us to study the second category of *Waterphors*: those that bear on the borders of the host country.

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[17] (EN): "The reality, little publicized in the media, is that the Head of State's irresponsible comments on immigration have resulted, in just a few days, in a massive influx of migrants, particularly in the Calais area."

[18] Example (9), which has already been quoted for the compound immigration-submersion, is another typical illustration of the combination phenomenon. Here, the WATER metaphor is associated to IMMIGRATION IS VIOLENCE/IMMIGRANTS ARE ATTACKERS with the verb *attaquer*. Or ces cultures si flamboyantes sont attaquées par le haut avec l'uniformisation forcée, et par le bas par le multiculturalisme lié à l'**immigration-submersion** (Le Pen, Speech, 2019).

4.3 Border and porosity

The second category of *Waterphors* combines CONTAINER metaphors and WATER metaphors since water can be regarded as the CONTENT of a CONTAINER. According to Nguyen and McCallum (2016: 167), the goal of these conceptual metaphors is to legitimize the necessity to toughen immigration policies. *Porosity* metaphors could be called 'indirect' water metaphors as they do not directly describe migrants as water but rather imply immigration has a liquid dimension, with the use of a metaphorical conceptualization of the country's borders, as illustrated by the following examples:

(20) At home, ***porous* borders** and unenforced immigration laws had created a host of vulnerabilities (Trump, Speech, 2017).

(21) Il reste figé sur ses conceptions archaïques et dramatiques, ouvrir nos frontières à la ***déferlante***[19] migratoire et croire à l'utopie des frontières européennes qui nous offre chaque jour le spectacle de leur ***porosité***, ânonnées sur le vivre ensemble, qui dans de trop nombreux quartiers est devenu le « vivre comme eux »[20] (Le Pen, Speech, 2015).

The notion of *porosity* is found in Le Pen and Trump's speeches. Even though the noun *porosité* and the adjective *porous* are used to describe the borders of the United States and France and enable the politician to describe the host country as a container with holes, immigrants are indirectly conceptualized as a liquid since the adjective *porous* is synonymous with *absorbent* or *permeable*.

Porosity can be related to the notion of *absorbance*, which has been found once, in example (22):

(22) Asylum is not a program for those living in poverty. There are billions of people in the world living at the poverty level. The

[19] According to the French dictionary *Larousse*, *déferlante* is an "ocean wave subject to breaking. A sudden and massive phenomenon; a tidal wave". (FR): « Onde océanique soumise au déferlement. Phénomène brutal et massif ; raz de marée »

[20] (EN): "He remains stuck on his archaic and dramatic conceptions, opening our borders to the migratory tide and believing in the utopia of European borders that offer us every day the spectacle of their porosity, harping on about living together, which in too many neighborhoods has become "living like them".

> United States cannot possibly ***absorb*** them all (Trump, Speech, 2018).

The verb *absorb* refers to the host country and thus does not directly depict migrants as a liquid. Nevertheless, the direct object, namely the pronoun *them*, refers to migrants with an implied metaphor, in other words, the notion of immigration is not explicitly mentioned. Consequently, as the United States is conceptualized as a spongy material with a limited capacity of absorbance of liquids, migrants become this liquid. To a certain extent, the mental picture of the sponge highlights the limited capacity of the country to welcome immigrants.

Furthermore, Le Pen often describes French or European borders as *colanders* or *filters*:

(23) Elle est là la terrible réalité : une fois le gratin international parti, le peuple français sera de nouveau livré à lui-même, avec les mêmes **frontières *passoires*** qui seront traversées par toujours plus d'immigrés clandestins où se cacheront toujours plus de terroristes[21] (Le Pen, Speech, 2015).

(24) Je le rappelle, la frontière n'est pas un mur, elle est un ***filtre***, elle ne règle pas tout, mais son absence aggrave considérablement notre vulnérabilité[22] (Le Pen, Speech, 2017).

(25) We will continue to work with friends and allies to deny radical Islamic terrorists any funding, territory, or support, or any means of ***infiltrating*** **our borders** (Trump, Speech, 2018).

According to Auboussier (2017), *colander* metaphors enable two different strategies. Firstly, thanks to them, the speaker can stigmatize the political opponent for their permissiveness and political irresponsibility. These metaphors show what Razac (2013) calls a poor management of permeability[23].

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[21] (EN): "This is the terrible reality: once the international elite have left, the French people will once again be left to fend for themselves, with the same sieve borders crossed by more and more illegal immigrants and hiding places for more and more terrorists."

[22] (EN): "I remind you, the border is not a wall, it's a filter, it doesn't solve everything, but its absence considerably worsens our vulnerability."

[23] The expression is "gestion de la perméabilité" in French.

Secondly, they enable the speaker to use WATER as a source domain once again. The function of a colander is indeed to drain food by removing excessive, and usually dirty, liquids from it. Moreover, examples (23) and (24) demonstrate that these inherently dysphemistic metaphors are usually surrounded by terms with a negative axiology (*terroristes, aggraver, vulnérabilité*, etc.). The notion of filter is indeed often associated with terrorism: Le Pen and Trump play on fears and suggest that some terrorists pretend to be migrants and *infiltrate* the country, which evokes the notion of intrusion. Moreover, in Le Pen's speeches, the *porous* borders also follow a gradation pattern since the colander becomes *floodgates*, the equivalent of *vannes* in French, while Trump directly uses *floodgates* without using the metaphor on a smaller scale:

(26) Biden's deadly migration policies will ***overwhelm*** taxpayers and open the ***floodgates*** to terrorists, jihadists, and violent extremists (Trump, Speech, 2020).

(27) C'est l'histoire d'un renoncement, d'un abandon. La France, le pays des droits de l'homme, le pays de la liberté, le pays de l'égalité, a renoncé à ce message exigeant mais universel qu'elle adressait au monde ! En ouvrant grand **les *vannes* de l'immigration**, en arrêtant de demander des efforts à ceux qui venaient sur notre sol en renonçant à l'assimilation, par nature individuelle, pour une intégration qu'on pensait collective et qui a nourri le terreau du communautarisme[24] (Le Pen, Speech, 2017).

The main objective of such metaphors is to blame the political opponent and to emphasize the so-called ease with which migrants enter the country. They are once again accompanied by negatively connoted terms (*deadly*, *violent, terrorists, renoncement*, etc.) that reinforce the dysphemistic dimension of the discourse since the goal is to criticize the political opponents. These metaphors also correspond to an amplification which consists in pushing the negative axiology of the water metaphor to its extreme, with a gradation (Jamet/Lafiandra

[24] (EN): "This is the story of a renunciation, an abandonment. France, the land of human rights, the land of liberty, the land of equality, has renounced the demanding but universal message it was sending out to the world! By opening the floodgates to immigration, by ceasing to demand effort from those who come to our shores, and by abandoning assimilation, which is by nature individual, in favor of what was thought to be collective integration, we have nurtured the breeding ground for communitarianism."

2023: 132). The gradation phenomenon can be related to Bednarek and Caple's (2016: 93) notion of "superlativeness" since immigration is "discursively constructed as being of high intensity or large scope", which is the main characteristic of water metaphors in the nationalist corpora. *Flux* becomes *submersion*, *vague* becomes *déferlante*, *porous borders* become *floodgates.* As noted by Van Der Valk (2003: 332): "Metaphors often occur in a discursive context of hyperbolical formulations or combined with other rhetorical figures such as repetitions."

5. Conclusion

How is immigration metaphorically conceptualized in terms of water in contemporary political discourse and how does the context impact the source domain? These were the main research questions.

The results show that two categories of *Waterphors* can be distinguished: on the one hand, WATER metaphors that directly conceptualize immigrant as WATER, with metaphors such as *submersion*, *pour*, *flow*, etc. On the other hand, there are those that represent the borders as colanders, with the notion of porosity, so as to criticize lenient immigration policies.

Regardless of the language, namely French and English, immigration metaphors are axiologically negative but Trump and Le Pen tend to push the degree of negativity to its maximum. Contrary to Biden, Clinton or Macron, who combine immigration *Waterphors* with axiologically positive terms (*hope*, *strength, opportunity, freedom*, etc.). The two nationalist politicians of the corpus use various strategies to highlight dangerousness: firstly, they combine these metaphors with very negative contexts, referring to terrorism, domination, communitarianism, emergency, etc. Then they also use amplification strategies and "superlativeness", using the same source domain (WATER) to refer to movements that are not only unidirectional (*flow*), but also multidirectional (*pour*).

The source domain of WATER is used by all the politicians of the corpus: immigrants are conceptualized as WATER. However, the evaluative dimension depends on the speaker and especially on the context: it is largely negative in Trump's and Le Pen's speeches and reinforces the already inherently negative dimension of the metaphors.

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