"Water always goes where it wants to go, and nothing in the end can stand against it"[1]: Water as a feminist metaphor

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Abstract

This article analyses how the metaphorical association between women and water has been used to control and exploit women and how this metaphorical connection has been reclaimed by feminists in order to resist control and, more radically, to shape how the general public conceptualise water itself and our relationship to it. My corpus is a collection of five feminist and/or queer works of literature, united by their use of metaphors of water in relation to women and/or feminism and which I analyse using feminist theory and critical metaphor analysis. The results show that the majority of the metaphors analysed are based on the conceptual metaphor A WOMAN IS WATER, which in turn are directly or indirectly based on a CONTAINER image schema. Sexist metaphors seek to contain women, in order to exploit them, whereas feminist metaphors highlight resisting containment. Underlying all of the metaphors in this paper is the idea of the immense power of water and its fundamental nature as a fluid, shape-shifting entity.

In diesem Artikel wird untersucht, wie die metaphorische Verbindung zwischen Frauen und Wasser dazu benutzt worden ist, Frauen zu kontrollieren und auszubeuten, und wie diese metaphorische Verbindung von Feministinnen zurückerobert wurde, um sich der Kontrolle zu widersetzen und – radikaler –, um selbst zu gestalten, wie die Öffentlichkeit das Wasser und unsere Beziehung zu ihm konzeptualisiert. Das Korpus ist eine Sammlung von fünf feministischen bzw. queeren literarischen Werken, die sich durch die Verwendung von Wassermetaphern in Bezug auf Frauen oder Feminismus auszeichnen und die ich mit kritischer Metaphernanalyse und feministischer Theorie analysiere. Die meisten der analysierten Metaphern beruhen, so zeigt sich, auf der konzeptuellen Metapher EINE FRAU IST WASSER, die letztlich wiederum auf einem CONTAINER-Bildschema beruht. Sexistische Metaphern zielen darauf ab, Frauen einzuschließen, um sie auszubeuten, während feministische Metaphern den Widerstand gegen das Einschließen hervorheben. Allen Wasser-Metaphern in diesem Beitrag liegt die Vorstellung von der enormen Kraft des Wassers und seinem Wesen als fließende, formverändernde Substanz zugrunde.

1. Introduction

Water and women have been symbolically and metaphorically linked in many different ways, whether through creation myths (Gaard 2001: 160), art (e.g., Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* depicts Venus emerging from the sea), literature (Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* as well as the works in my corpus), or

[1] Atwood (2005: 43).

more recently, feminist politics (Laughlin et al. 2010; Martín Alcoff/Stone 2014). The shape-shifting nature of water has been used to capture a multitude of perceived traits belonging to women and/or the female body. For instance, Gaard argues that the female body has long been associated with water, both being conceptualised as "sacred sources of creation" (Gaard 2001: 160). Supposedly feminine traits were then also linked to the properties of water (e.g., the fickle nature of the sea – and therefore by implication women – in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*). Recently, however, feminists have begun reclaiming water metaphors, using them not to describe any supposedly innate female or feminine characteristics, but as a model to follow when confronted with an obstacle (Laughlin et al. 2010; Martín Alcoff/Stone 2014). In order to tackle the global water crisis, which disproportionately affects women and girls, feminists have also been actively engaged in changing the way in which the general public conceptualise water itself through the strategic use of certain metaphors, e.g., WATER IS A COMMON GOOD (Azcona et al. 2023) which is part of a global hydrocommons.

The wide-ranging and sometimes contradictory nature of these metaphors seems to reflect the fluidity of water itself, sometimes a trickle, sometimes a tidal wave, sometimes fast moving, sometimes advancing drip by drip. Whether it is to create or destroy, to give life or take it, water is a powerful entity. It is necessary for all life on earth, but also something that can cause immense damage and loss of life. Its power and shape-shifting nature makes it an inherently difficult entity to contain and therefore control.

In this article, I analyse some of the water metaphors used in five feminist and/or queer works of literature, examining the water metaphors that have been used to portray the female body as the cradle of life, how women have both been conceptualised as resources to be exploited, but also how feminists are trying to reclaim metaphors of women and water in a more positive light as a symbol of subversive and indirect resistance to empower women.

The great majority of linguistic metaphors identified are based on the conceptual metaphor A WOMAN IS WATER. I show that what links most of these metaphors, is the idea of control, domination and exploitation. Indeed, the majority of the metaphors examined in this paper entail correspondences involving the image schema of CONTAINMENT and control: either attempts to control, dominate or exploit or resistance to this control, domination and

exploitation. However, what underlies all of the metaphors in this paper is the idea of the immense power of water and its fundamental nature as a fluid, shape-shifting entity.

2. Conceptual frameworks, corpus and methodology

The conceptual frameworks that inform this article are feminism and Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA).

2.1 Feminism

Feminism has taken a particular interest in water metaphors due to the longstanding perception of a link between women and water and the way that water metaphors have been used to criticise women and justify their subordinate status in society. For instance, in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), Santiago, the old man, conceptualises the sea as a woman:

> He always thought of the sea as 'la mar' which is what people call *her* in Spanish when they love *her*. Sometimes those who love *her* say bad things of *her* but they are always said *as though she were a woman*. Some of the younger fishermen, those who used buoys as floats for their lines and had motorboats, bought when the shark livers had brought much money, spoke of *her* as 'el mar' which is masculine. They spoke of *her as a contestant or a place or even an enemy*. But the old man always thought of *her as feminine* and *as something that gave or withheld great favours*, and if *she* did wild or wicked things it was because *she* could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought (Hemingway 1952: 10).

This extract shows the different mappings when the sea is conceptualised as a man or a woman. When the sea is conceptualised as a man through the eyes of some of the younger men, it is thought of as a contestant, place or enemy. However, when the sea is conceptualised through the eyes of the old man, it is endowed with stereotypically feminine traits, such as lack of emotional control and the apparently mysterious ways in which women work. In both cases, the sea is being personified through the male gaze (Mulvey 1975), a term coined by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey to describe the act of depicting women from a male, heterosexual perspective that tends to represent women as sexual objects. If the kinds of great favours that the sea gives to or withholds from men (clement weather, abundant fish, storms, etc.) seems obvious, the kind of great

favours that women give to or withhold from men is more implicit here. We can make a reasonable guess that there is a mapping of female sexuality. When the sea is personified as a man, however, there are no mappings of sexuality. The stereotype of women who are emotionally unstable, particularly around menstruation is reflected in the reference to the moon. This kind of mapping reinforces the stereotype that women are overly emotional and not capable of making rational choices and is exactly what feminists have been criticising.

Ecofeminists later reclaimed water metaphors in a more positive light. Ecofeminist philosopher Astrida Neimanis coined the term "hydrofeminism", which acknowledges the connection between female bodies and water, emphasising for example, that the female body and water are both nurturers of life. However, ecofeminism also critically highlights the similarities in the way both the female body and water have been treated in a patriarchal system as commodities to be exploited. In her book, *The Death of Nature* (1980), Ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant argues that the Scientific Revolution that took place during the 16th and 17th centuries fundamentally changed our conceptualization of nature (including water): Before the Scientific Revolution, "[p]opular Renaissance literature was filled with hundreds of images associating nature, matter, and the earth with the female sex. The earth was alive and considered to be a beneficent, receptive, nurturing female" (Merchant 1980: 28). However, this view allowed for several variants: one was nature conceptualised as "a kindly and caring motherly provider" (ibid.: 6), but another was an Arcadian image that allowed for the conceptualization of nature as "bride whose primary function was to comfort; nurture, and provide for the wellbeing of the male" (ibid.: 9). Merchant argues that the latter view was easily incorporated into a mechanized world view, in which, for example, "[t]he cultivation of a bountiful mother earth helped to hasten the disruption and exploitation of new and 'virgin' lands" across the Atlantic (ibid.: 20).

Science would thus be the tool to enable men to extract Nature's secrets so that she could be dominated and exploited. Once science had provided the tools to better understand and control natural elements such as water, men could build dams and divert rivers. They could control water. For example, the large dam-building projects in the USA and USSR post-WWII were based on the metaphor WATER IS A PERSON:

> [T]he belief that nature ought to be controlled – indeed could be controlled – through the melding of scientific study, large-scale technology, and appropriate government structures. The utilitarian aspects [...] came from a deeply ingrained belief among specialists in both countries that water *had an obligation to humanity*, indeed, a *moral duty, to fulfil many missions* before it flowed wastefully into the sea (Josephson 2002: 68, quoted in Goatly 2007: 291).

It cannot logically be argued that water has moral duties or obligations towards humans; only entities endowed with reason can have these. It is thus being personified as a human, but a human with an obligation to nurture and provide for humanity as a whole. It is not necessarily the case that water is being personified as a woman here, there are however, implicit links that could be made due to the fact that water has historically been personified as a woman (see Gaard 2001: 160 for examples) and that women are often seen as having a duty to provide care for children and the elderly and spend on average "more than 2.5 times as many hours a day on unpaid care work than men" (UNICEF & WHO 2023).

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood draws on this idea of women as having an obligation to society. In the novel, humans' over-exploitation and pollution of water has resulted in the pollution of human bodies and a dramatic rise in infertility. As a consequence, it is women's bodies that are being exploited and treated as a national resource that have a duty to produce children. Offred, the main character, says:

> I cannot avoid seeing, now, the small tattoo on my ankle. Four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse. It's supposed to guarantee that I will never be able to fade, finally, into another landscape. I am too important, too scarce, for that. I am *a national resource* (Atwood 1985: 75).

Mainstream conceptualisations of water, and nature more generally, as resources to be exploited have negatively impacted our environment and the effects of this exploitation are disproportionally felt by women. It is girls and women who are usually the ones who walk for miles to collect water for their families. Not only is this physically very demanding, and time they are not in school, or with their families, they often face many dangers along insecure routes where they may encounter sexual harassment and violence (UNICEF & WHO 2023). Part of Makumbi's historical novel *The First Woman*, which is also known under the title *A Girl Is a Body of Water*, is set in the early 1980s during

the Ugandan civil war. The author mentions how "[g]irls could not go down to the river to fetch water because army men were rumoured to lurk in the forest below the school" (Makumbi 2021: 208).

Ecofeminists thus criticise the metaphor WATER IS A COMMODITY and are strategically trying to replace it with WATER IS A COMMON GOOD (Azcona et al. 2023: 2). One way they are doing this is to use the metaphor WE ARE ALL BODIES OF WATER — human, animal, vegetable, geophysical or meteorological body:

> My body – like yours – primarily comprises water. My existence as a body of water is a biological fact, but living my embodiment as watery – embedded in a world that I share with other human, animal, vegetable, geophysical and meteorological bodies that also comprise water – has other implications as well. *We are all bodies of water* (Neimanis 2013: 24).

Our human bodies are, after all, made up of about 60% water: "Water and chemicals is all it is, hardly more to it than a jellyfish", as Offred notes in *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood 1985: 115) when contemplating the frailty of the human body.

The hydrofeminist metaphor of WE ARE ALL BODIES OF WATER conceptualises our bodies as *part of* water, not as something separate. In the fantasy novella *The Deep*, the main character Yetu experiences this connection in a very embodied way: "Water, outside her in the pool, inside her body in the form of life-sustaining blood and wet tissue, both connected. She saw it all move in a circle as real as a remembering. Inside her, outside her, one" (Solomon et al. 2019: 96).

The idea that language is embodied is a central postulate in cognitive linguistics. WE ARE ALL BODIES OF WATER is an attempt to blur the boundaries between categories, so that we are forced to reevaluate our relationship with other beings in the world and realise that "we are not separate from our 'environments' […and that we have …] obligations to bodies beyond human ones" (Neimanis 2013: 25). Although the metaphor WE ARE ALL BODIES OF WATER encompasses WOMEN ARE WATER, the goal of this metaphor is ultimately to change the way we treat water in order to improve the lives of women and girls in the global south.

If we bear in mind that we are literally about 60% water, we are no longer strictly in the realm of metaphor. Goatly argues that this blurring of the distinction

between source domain and target domain is more radical than the simple relexicalisation of a metaphor:

> We have something more radical here than metaphor – a re-drawing of literal boundaries and categories, so that we can no longer *katogerein* [sic!] or "accuse" the Other. Interestingly, her [feminist philosopher Donna Haraway's] thinking may be subconsciously determined by the themes CATEGORY IS A DIVIDED AREA and RELATIONSHIP IS COHESION. According to the metaphorical logic different categories will be divided from other categories, and division is the end of a relationship, so that we can only have a relationship if we belong to the same category (Goatly 2007: 117).

The political goal of hydrofeminists is to redraw the conceptual boundaries between our bodies and water. One way they are doing this is through their use of metaphors, one of the central tenets of feminist linguistics being that language is an arena in which struggles over language are part of larger power struggles. As Norman Fairclough notes, "[t]he stake is more than 'mere words'; it is controlling the contours of the political world, it is legitimizing policy, and it is sustaining power relations" (Fairclough 2015: 75). The power to name things is not simply a linguistic victory, it can also have concrete effects. Strategically promoting the metaphor WE ARE ALL BODIES OF WATER and WATER IS A COMMON GOOD is an attempt to change the way we think about water in order to improve women's lives.

2.2 Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA)

CMA can broadly be described as part of a cognitive linguistics approach to Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) (Hart 2018). CMA is part of a cognitive linguistics approach because for both, language is embodied, i.e., we conceptualise the world around us through our bodily experiences with it. These experiences can be summarised in a few basic image schemas, such as CONTAINER, PART-WHOLE, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, and MOTION (Lakoff 1987: 271–78). Image schemas are very basic, or *skeletal* structures that constantly recur in everyday life. They are skeletal in the sense that relatively little is mapped from source to target domain. It is simply the basic image or structure that is used. For instance, we tend to conceptualise many things based on a CONTAINER schema including our bodies, but also societies. Image schemas can thus serve as the basis for different conceptual metaphors, e.g., THE BODY IS A

CONTAINER and A SOCIETY IS A CONTAINER. These conceptual metaphors then allow for linguistic metaphors such as "Fatigue is here, *in* my body, *in* my legs and eyes" (Atwood 1985: 235) and "Gilead was, although undoubtedly patriarchal in form, occasionally matriarchal *in* content" (Atwood 1985: 246). Another common image schema is SOURCE-PATH-GOAL (Lakoff 1987: 275). We conceptualise many things as objects in motion with a starting point, stages and a final destination resulting in cognitive metaphors like EXTERNAL EVENTS ARE LARGE, MOVING OBJECTS (Kövecses 2010: 163) and linguistic metaphors such as "First, Second, or Third *Wave* feminism".

CMA is part of CDS because it shares CDS's central goal of uncovering the often-hidden power dynamics that are reflected and reinforced in language use. They both focus on language and power; however, CDS does not necessarily focus on any one particular linguistic phenomenon, whereas CMS focuses specifically on the analysis of metaphor.

According to CMA, metaphors are a "fundamentally persuasive discourse act" (Charteris-Black 2004: 13). This is because metaphors emphasise some aspects of the target and source, while obscuring others: "Metaphors are cognitive filters, but different metaphors filter different particles of truth" (Goatly 2007: 25), thus allowing a speaker to manipulate information by highlighting certain perceived similarities while hiding others. For instance, although the waves metaphor has been useful in feminist historiography, allowing feminists to position themselves within specific currents, histories and legacies of feminism, drawing on the authority of tradition and history, it has also obscured many aspects of feminism and marginalised certain groups within feminism (Garrison 2006; Laughlin et al. 2010; Browne 2014). The wave metaphor implies a surge or swell of activity followed by ebb. Second Wave feminism *surged* in the 1960s and 70s in the UK and USA. According to the wave model, there was an *ebb*, or period of inactivity, until next swell in the 1990s with the Third Wave. But this only shows part of the story of feminism. Black feminism didn't ebb between the 70s and 90s, it surged. The waves model has been criticised for highlighting the story of White, middle-class feminism, in English-speaking countries and erasing Black feminism in other countries. The waves metaphor is the dominant metaphor for talking about feminism but it obscures all kinds of feminist activity that was taking place outside of the UK and USA in non-White, non-middle-class groups.

Matthews very eloquently states the problem of the wave metaphor thus:

> In his famous formulation of what happens in between, Alberto Melucci (1989) conceptualises the periods before and after the visible *wave* as those of "*submerged* networks", where the cultural codes and social agencies that will form the coming *wave roll* and *build*, out of sight to most. This invocation of visibility through the oceanic metaphor helps us to identify the perspectival nature of this framework and ask the critical question, "Out of sight to whom?" The very notion of infrequent *waves*, between which *insurgent* forces exist in a state of unseen *oceanic submergence*, privileges a certain perspective; one that claims to be capable of viewing the entirety of the social container, while relying on a "public" visibility mediated by compromised media industries. In truth, social, political and class struggles *bubble up* all the time in countless locations and at various scales, and this is far from invisible to the people there. By attending to the water metaphor, we confront the implied standpoint underpinning this conceptualisation (Matthews 2023: 1826).

This focus on persuasion is particularly appropriate for a critical feminist analysis as the pragmatic of effect of many of the metaphors that I analyse is political persuasion. This means that my analysis is critical in the sense that I begin from the assumption that metaphors do not simply reflect a pre-existing objective reality but actively construct a certain version of reality and that this version is not neutral. It benefits some groups over others. My analysis thus highlights the gendered power dynamics involved in certain water metaphors.

Although my corpus is made of literary texts, they are also arguably political in nature. The authors are all self declared feminists and their works can be read as an artistic response to socio-political events and therefore count as both literary and political texts in the same way that a protest song does (Hart 2019: 9).

2.3 Corpus

My corpus is a collection of five feminist and/or queer works of literature which are united by their use of metaphors of water in relation to women and/or feminism.

SOURCE	AUTHOR	DATE	GENRE	NR OF WORDS
The Handmaid's Tale	Margaret Atwood	1985	Speculative fiction	97 827
The Penelopiad	Margaret Atwood	2005	Parallel novel, Greek mythology retelling	30 965
Earthsong	Suzette Haden Elgin	2019 [1994]	Dystopian science fiction	77 287
The First Woman / A Girl is a Body of Water	Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi	2021	Historical fiction, coming of age	133 563
The Deep	Rivers Solomon et al.	2019	Fantasy	40 879
			Total nr of words:	380 521

Table 1: Corpus

2.4 Methodology

My approach was deductive, in that I started out with predefined source and target domains (WOMEN and WATER) that I was searching for. One weakness of this approach is that there is a high probability that "an analyst may tend to find exactly the kind of evidence he or she is looking for" (Cameron 2003: 252, cited in Krennmayr 2013: 8) and that a "deductive approach is prone to missing metaphors because the possibilities of describing and defining conceptual metaphors are infinite and lack clear boundaries" (Krennmayr 2013: 11). In order to combat these potential problems, I used a combination of Jonathan Charteris-Black's three-step methodology and the MIPVU method.

Charteris-Black's three-step methodology (Charteris-Black 2004: 34–35) is based on Norman Fairclough's (1995: 6) three stages of identification, interpretation, and explanation in CDS:

- Metaphor identification: deciding whether there are metaphors present in a text and which ones.

- Metaphor interpretation: establishing the cognitive and pragmatic factors at play in the metaphors identified.
- Metaphor explanation: explaining how the metaphors are interrelated, how they make sense in the context in which they are used, and their ideological motivation.

For the first stage of metaphor identification, I adopted the methodology known as MIPVU (Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit), based on the MIP procedure put together by the Pragglejaz group at Lancaster University in the UK (Pragglejaz Group 2007). The original MIP method was later refined by a group of researchers at Vrije University in the Netherlands (Steen et al. 2010) to produce the MIPVU method. One of the reasons that I used MIPVU instead of MIP is that MIPVU allows a wider range of metaphorical expressions, including *direct* metaphorical expressions such as simile and analogy. For instance, in the following example from Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, which is part of my corpus, MIP would not class "behave like water" as a metaphor, whereas MIPVU would: "But I was the daughter of a Naiad; I remembered my mother's advice to me. Behave *like water*, I told myself" (Atwood 2005: 107–8).

The six-step MIPVU procedure (Steen et al. 2010: 25–26) is outlined below. I have added some examples from my corpus to illustrate how it works.

1. "Find metaphor-related words (MRWs) by examining the text on a word-by word basis." (Steen et al. 2010: 25). As my corpus is 380 521 words, I only applied the method to my search terms (see below), not every word of the corpus. I read the relevant novels making a list of words that seemed to be used in a metaphorical way to describe a relationship between water and women. I expanded this word list using various online thesauruses to find synonyms. I then uploaded digital versions of the five novels onto the online corpus linguistics tool SketchEngine and searched the whole corpus for the following 75 lemmas:

aquatic, *bath, bathe, board,* boat, *boil, bubble, canal,* cargo, *confluence, current, dam,* damp, *deep, delta,* depth, dissolve, *dike, drain, drip, drink, drop, drown,* duck, ebb, fish, *float,* flow, *fluid,* fountain, *hail, ice,* icy, *inundate,* leak, *levee,* liquid, *navigate,* ocean, octopus, ooze, *moisture, plumb,* porpoise, *pour, rain,* ripple, river, sail, sea, *shallow,* ship, *shore,* shower, sink, snow, source, *splash, steam,* storm, stream,

surge, swamp, swan, *swim*, *tears*, *tempest*, *thirst*, tide, trickle, vessel, *wash*, water, wave, *wet*.

Occurrences of the words were only kept if they had a link to women and water. At this stage, I had a list of 204 occurrences of the 37 words in recte. If an occurrence was clearly not metaphorical, it was deleted. The other words in the list (in italics) were not found at all, or were not used to link women and water. I then followed the steps below to verify whether each occurrence was used metaphorically or not.

2. "When a word is used indirectly and that use may potentially be explained by some form of cross-domain mapping from a more basic meaning of that word, mark the word as metaphorically used (MRW)" (Steen et al. 2010: 25). "Indirect" here means a regular metaphor such as "To him I'm not just *a boat with no cargo*" in *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood 1985: 172). The noun phrase "a boat with no cargo" usually has a more basic concrete meaning of a vessel used for transporting goods on water that happens to be empty. However, in the context of the novel, it is used to describe Offred's body (the boat) not carrying a child (cargo), i.e., she is not pregnant.

3. "When a word is used directly and its use may potentially be explained by some form of cross-domain mapping to a more basic referent or topic in the text, mark the word as direct metaphor (MRW, direct)" (Steen et al. 2010). "Direct" metaphors include similes and analogies such as "behave *like water*" in the above quote from *The Penelopiad* (Atwood 2005: 107–108).

4. "When words are used for the purpose of lexico-grammatical substitution, such as third-person personal pronouns, or when ellipsis occurs where words may be seen as missing, as in some forms of co-ordination, and when a direct or indirect meaning is conveyed by those substitutions or ellipses that may potentially be explained by some form of cross-domain mapping from a more basic meaning, referent, or topic, insert a code for implicit metaphor (MRW, implicit)" (Steen et al. 2010). For example, when one of the characters in *The First Woman* compares women to water in an implicit way: "'When our ancients looked at women,' Nsuuta continued, 'they saw something else.' 'What did they see?' '*Women in women. Women in water*'" (Makumbi 2021: 56).

5. "When a word functions as a signal that a cross-domain mapping may be at play, mark it as a metaphor flag (MFlag)" (Steen et al. 2010: 26). This includes

words such as *like, as, more, less, more/less than, compare, comparison, comparative, same, similar, analogy, analogue, regard as, conceive of, see as, imagine, think, talk, behave as if*, etc. An example from my corpus would be the above "behave *like* water" example from *The Penelopiad* (Atwood 2005: 107–108).

6. "When a word is a new-formation coined, examine the distinct words that are its independent parts according to steps 2 through 5" (Steen et al. 2010: 26). I did not find any examples of this in my corpus.

Six occurrences in my corpus could not be classed as linguistic metaphors per se, but it was clear that a cross-domain mapping was at play. In this case, I decided to keep them in my final list but noted them as myths rather than metaphors. For example, "They claimed that the very first woman rose out of the *sea* while the first man emerged from earth" in *The First Woman* (Makumbi 2021: 54).

After following the above six steps, I was left with 149 occurrences of linguistic metaphors and six occurrences of myths.

Charteris-Black's second stage is metaphor interpretation (Charteris-Black 2004: 35), which involves "establishing a relationship between metaphors and the cognitive and pragmatic factors that determine them" (ibid.: 37). For instance, in *The Handmaid's Tale,* Aunt Lydia tells Offred that she has to eat healthily because she "must be a worthy *vessel*" to carry a child (Atwood 1985: 57). However, as Charteris-Black argues, "[i]n order to make a claim for a conceptual metaphor there is necessarily a need for other linguistic forms that are motivated by this same idea" (ibid.: 38). Other metaphors with the same underlying conceptual metaphor were indeed found, for example "To him I'm not just *a boat with no cargo*" also in *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood 1985: 172), and in *Earthsong* "Sometimes they had advantages men would have liked to have — like the way they had survived the Icehouse Effect, all that fat under their skin bringing them *sailing* through it while the men died like pathetic flies all around them" (Haden Elgin 2019: 152). In total, 18 occurences of metaphors based on the conceptual metaphor A WOMAN IS A VESSEL were found. The same process was followed with the 149 occurrenes of linguistic metaphors, which I grouped into the following six conceptual metaphors, plus one group of miscellaneous water metaphors and a small group of myths (full results can be found in the annexe):

- A WOMAN IS WATER (70 occurrences)
- A WOMAN IS A VESSEL (17 occurrences)
- A WOMAN IS AN AQUATIC CREATURE (17 occurrences)
- A WOMAN IS A SOURCE OF WATER (11 occurrences)
- WATER IS A WOMAN (10 occurrences)
- Miscellaneous water metaphors (24 occurrences)
- Myths (women come from water) (6 occurrences)

The third stage is metaphor explanation, which involves explaining how the metaphors are interrelated, how they make sense in the context in which they are used, and their ideological motivation. This stage will be dealt with in the main body of this article, which focuses on three main water metaphors from a feminist perspective. Part 3.1 focuses on how water metaphors are used to subordinate women. The main metaphors in this part are A WOMAN IS WATER and A WOMAN IS AN AQUATIC CREATURE. Part 3.2 discusses how women are described as vessels (A WOMAN IS A VESSEL), as well as seas on which vessels sail (A WOMAN IS WATER). The final part, 3.3 examines how feminists have used water metaphors to describe and structure resistance (FEMINIST RESISTANCE IS WATER which I have classed under A WOMAN IS WATER).

3. Analysis

3.1 "[W]omen […] today they are this, tomorrow they are that."[2]

A great number of origin myths from a variety of cultures conceptualise the world as springing forth from water in the form of a woman. In Ancient Egypt, the goddess Nu (literally "the watery one") is the personification of the primordial watery abyss from which all life arose. In Greek mythology, Thalassa (literally "sea") is the general name for the sea and is personified by a female goddess of the same name (See Gaard 2001: 160 for more examples from a variety of times and cultures). This personification is not just a European conception. Makumbi's coming of age novel, *The First Woman*, is set in 1970s and 1980s Uganda and recounts the creation myth of the first woman, Nnamazzi. Nnamazzi is said to have risen from the sea, bringing with her all the bodies of water bodies on earth. As a result, most bodies of water on earth,

[2] Makumbi (2021: 55).

including a stream in the novel called the Nnankya, are therefore personified as women:

> She came to the Nnankya, a stream which formed the border between Nattetta and Kisoga. Because Nnankya, the spirit who owned the stream, was a clanswoman, Kirabo walked to the bank to say hello. […] Water made irate noises where stones or plants stood in its way; *it sucked its teeth* when there was a dip in the gradient (Makumbi 2021: 32).

According to the Ugandan creation myth, the universe was divided into four realms: heaven, the underworld, land and sea. Heaven belonged to the gods, the underworld to the dead, land to men, and the sea to women. However, according to Nsuuta, the village "witch" (ibid.: 12) and "radical mwenkanonkano[3] activist" (ibid.: 228–229), this creation myth was fabricated by the ancients in order to dispossess women of any rights to the land:

> "Oh yes, that was because the ancients had told another story — that women were not of land."
> "Women not of land, how?"
> "Ancients saw the universe as divided into four realms. […] The first realm was heaven." She wrote HEAVEN where North would be. "Then UNDERWORLD." She placed it on the South point. "Then SEA." She placed it on the West point. "And finally, LAND." She placed it on the East point. "That is the ancient compass." […]
> "Heaven was the world of the gods, yes?"
> "Yes."
> "The underworld is where the dead begin a new life — yes?"
> "Yes."
> "If land belonged to man, what is left?"
> "The sea."
> "Ah haa. *The sea*, the ancients claimed, *was woman's realm*."
> "Whaat? *Women belonged in water*?"
> "And if they did, they could not share in land wealth, could they? 'If you want property,' they told women ancients, '*go back to your sea* and grab to your heart's content'" (ibid.: 53–54).

[3] Author, Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi uses the term *mwenkanonkano*, a Luganda word, to refer to a local form of feminism, as opposed to the English word *feminism*, which for the main character "was for women in developed countries with first-world problems" (Makumbi 2021: 218).

What Makumbi is trying to do here is to show how the myth of Nnamazzi has been turned into a story that serves the interests of men. If the first woman came from the sea, then it allows for the metaphors A WOMAN IS WATER and A WOMAN IS AN AQUATIC CREATURE. Nsuuta explains to Kirabo that,

> You do not realise, but ancients had such an irrational fear of the nature of women that they would try anything to keep them under control. They supported this story by pointing to the sea. Apparently, *both women and the sea were baffling, changeful: today they are this, tomorrow they are that*. […] I think that in their buziba mind, the unconscious one, *women were two things at once – aquatic and terrestrial. Human but fish, beautiful but grotesque, exciting but frightening, nurturing but malevolent. Today they are this shape; tomorrow they have shifted into something quite different – dubious, slippery, secretive and mysterious* (ibid.: 55).

The ancients thus used these metaphors as a way of containing and limiting women's power, such as land ownership. Nsuuta also argues that not only was the myth of the first woman used to deny women property rights, but that it also turned them into rootless migrants:

> "And that is how women were stopped from owning land wealth?"
> "Stories have such power you cannot imagine. That one turned women into migrants on land. Since then, women have been rootless — moved not just across places but clans, tribes, nations, even races. Here in Buganda, they sold mainly girls and women into slavery to the Arabs. They were considered rootless" (ibid.: 55).

The pragmatic and ideological effects of these metaphors is that a social phenomenon (sexism) is portrayed as natural and therefore beyond human control, thus legitimising the disenfranchisement of women and allowing them to be conceptualised as commodities in a similar way to how water is often conceptualised as a commodity with no rights: "'Fathers sold daughters; husbands bought wives. Once we became a commodity, men could do whatever they wished with us. Even now our bodies do not belong to us'" (ibid.: 66). Scholar, Eleanor Hayman, for instance, notes that the female body has very often been viewed throughout history as a "neutral, and passive resource […] as an inanimate commodity to be regulated and managed" by men (Hayman 2012: 23). Kövecses argues that PEOPLE ARE COMMODITIES is "a completely conventional conceptual metaphor" (Kövecses 2010: 298) and it is not the case that only women have been conceptualised as commodities — both female and

male slaves have been bought and sold throughout history. For example, in the novella *The Deep* (Solomon et al. 2019) the both male and female slaves are described as cargo:

> We could not hide the truth of what happens on the ocean surface from all the zoti aleyu, many following us to discover our secret truth. The first such time, a group of them followed us and watched as a ship cast all of its *cargo* into the deep, the enslaved having been taken by some sickness (Solomon et al. 2019: 44).

It is the case, however, that there is a clear power hierarchy between those who can buy commodities and those who *are* commodities and that women have historically tended to be seen as commodities in a patriarchal system. One of the main reasons for this treatment, is their capacity to bear children. As such, women, and in particular their wombs, have often been conceptualised as a vessel.

3.2 "I'm not just a boat with no cargo"[4]

There is a long tradition of referring to ships as "she" in English, dating back to at least the 17th century (Curzan 2003: 83). In the examples that follow, however, it is the female body, particularly its capacity to carry children, that is metaphorically described as a ship. What many of the metaphors in this part have in common is the gestational potential of water that is linked with the gestational potential of the female body. In this paradigm "woman=water=womb=life" (Staniland 2023: 4–5).

There are several examples of the metaphor THE WOMB IS A VESSEL in *The Handmaid's Tale*, a dystopian society in which potentially fertile women have become the slaves of the politically elite, their job to get pregnant and repopulate the nation.

> We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. […] We are two-legged wombs, that's all: *sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices* (Atwood 1985: 146).
>
> And I for him. To him I'm no longer merely a usable body. To him I'm not just *a boat with no cargo, a chalice with no wine in it,* an oven – to be crude – minus the bun. To him I am not merely empty (ibid.: 172).

[4] Atwood (1985: 172).

The handmaids are only seen in their function as "sacred vessels", not as full human beings, with their own opinions and desires. They are reduced to their role of gestational carrier and once they give birth to a baby, they are sent to another family to repeat the process.

The Deep is a fantasy novella set under the Atlantic Ocean. The characters are mermaid-like creatures who descend from the pregnant slave women thrown overboard during the transatlantic slave trade. The body of one slave woman is described as a vessel carrying a child:

> One day we are swimming but a few feet down from the surface in pleasantly cool waters, when there's a plop from above, a struggle causing the water to stir, and then a sinking.
> The surface dweller is in our arms, heart still beating, but we are too far from any land for us to think of dragging it to an island. It is unconscious, and its belly is round with child. We bring it to the surface so it might breathe, but it never comes to. Underfed and malnourished, this is no surprise. We wonder how close it was to death already before whatever devil who captained that ship abandoned it to the seas.
> The two-legs dies in our arms, but not moments later, its body starts moving, taken over by a spirit or some other thing of the next world. Afraid, we let go. We don't wish to intervene with the dead. We watch from a distance, feel its convulsions in the water against our skin.
> Its eyes are closed. It is dead, isn't it? Yet it moves as if something is inside of it, using its body as *a vessel*.
> As we see the two-legs's belly move and bend, something inside of it indenting the flesh, we understand its baby is trying to get born (Solomon et al. 2019: 58–59).

The metaphor A WOMAN (THE WOMB) IS A VESSEL reflects the Ancient Greek conception of women's bodies as passive receptacles for the active male seed, which was not dispelled by science until the late 19th century. Women only contributed to an environment in which the man's child could grow and be nurtured, a vessel in which the child could be safely transported to shore. Ships, boats, etc., are functional objects. They serve the needs of humans by transporting goods and people. This idea is also present in the description of the main character in *The Deep*, Yetu, as a vessel. In this case, she is not a vessel for a child, but for the memory of her people. She sacrifices her own mental health for the good of the others, who are free of the painful memories of where they came from.

> "You don't know what it's like, blessed with the rememberings as you are," said Amaba. Yetu did know what it was like. After all, wasn't cavity just another word for *vessel*? Her own self had been scooped out when she was a child of fourteen years to make room for ancestors, leaving her empty and wandering and ravenous (ibid.: 9).

Once a year there is a remembering ceremony, held in a giant mud sphere called *the womb*. In a ceremony reminiscent of giving birth, Yetu shares her people's memories. However, after the ceremony, "When they'd had their fill of the rememberings, they would come for her and pour it back into Yetu, a cracked *vessel*. In time, she'd be subsumed" (ibid.: 30).

In both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Deep*, neither Offred or Yetu want to be vessels. They are constrained by society to take on this role, told that they have an obligation, a moral duty to their society. When Yetu runs away during the rememberings, "She worried for her fellow wajinru, too, suffering woefully because of her neglect of duty" (ibid.: 95). This links back to the idea mentioned in the introduction that women, water and nature in general are seen as having a duty to nuture and care for others and that they should sacrifice themselves for the greater good.

Atwood also uses a vessel metaphor in the *The Penelopiad*, but in this case the vessel is the babies inside the womb, which is conceptualised as a dangerous sea:

> Nine months he *sailed* the wine-red *seas* of his mother's blood
> Out of the cave of dreaded Night, of sleep,
> Of troubling dreams he *sailed*
> In his frail dark *boat*, the *boat* of himself,
> Through the dangerous *ocean* of his vast mother he *sailed*
> From the distant cave where the threads of men's lives are spun,
> Then measured, and then cut short
> By the Three Fatal Sisters, intent on their gruesome handcrafts,
> And the lives of women also are twisted into the strand.
> And we, the twelve who were later to die by his hand
> At his father's relentless command,
> *Sailed* as well, in the dark frail *boats* of ourselves
> Through the *turbulent* seas of our swollen and sore-footed mothers
> Who were not royal queens, but a motley and piebald collection,
> Bought, traded, captured, kidnapped from serfs and strangers
> (Atwood 2005: 65–66).

The metaphor in this extract is A WOMAN (THE WOMB) IS A DANGEROUS SEA. It is based on the common metaphor of sailing as a metaphor for life, i.e., LIFE IS A (SEA) JOURNEY. In the case of the above quote, the more specific metaphor would be PREGNANCY AND BIRTH ARE A DANGEROUS SEA JOURNEY. The foetuses are developing inside their mothers' wombs and on a perilous voyage towards life on the outside, via the birth canal. Written with Atwood's pen, the pragmatic and ideological effect of the metaphor THE WOMB IS A DANGEROUS SEA is not sexist. Atwood does not imply that women's nature is inherently capricious and dangerous, she is exploiting "the well-established psychoanalytic connection between motherhood and water" (Fois/Virdis 2022: 11) and perhaps also hinting at the power of the female body.

The foetuses in question are Telemachus and the twelve maids. They are all metaphorically described as "dark frail boats" sailing through "the dangerous ocean of his vast mother" and the "turbulent seas of our swollen and sore-footed mothers", which contrasts sharply with stereotypes of women as natural carers and nurturers. Once again, we can see a feminist reworking of metaphors of women and water as part of a retelling of the traditional myth of *The Odyssey* from a feminist perspective. Women and water are still deeply connected, but not in a way that sees their innate nature as capricious, unreliable or dangerous.

3.3 "If you can't go through an obstacle, go around it. Water does."[5]

In the previous section, I looked at how women/the female body have been conceptualised from a patriarchal perspective, the entailments that these metaphors can and have had as well as how some have tried to reclaim them.

The main metaphor that I will focus on in this part is FEMINISM IS WATER, which is expressed in two different ways: FEMINISM IS A WAVE and FEMINISM IS A COMPLEX FLOW OF WATER. I classed these three metaphors under A WOMAN IS WATER as they are essentially describing the actions of women; however, they are also all based on the general metaphor EXTERNAL EVENTS ARE LARGE, MOVING OBJECTS, which is common to social movements in general, not just feminism.

In part 2.2, I discussed how the metaphor FEMINISM IS A WAVE has tended to highlight some forms of feminism while hiding others. In response to the

[5] Atwood (2005: 43).

shortcomings of the wave metaphor, feminists have advocated other types of water metaphors which aim to "redefine feminism as a configuration of intersecting movements and concerns" (Martín Alcoff/Stone 2014: ix). This redefinition aims to retell the story of feminism from a wider perspective, acknowledging that the movement started well before the First Wave (there have been many people who advocated for equality for women over the centuries, and whom we could label as feminists, albeit anachronistically) and that it is entwined with other social movements (e.g., the anti-slavery movement in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the environmental movement today). This redefining is not, however, simply about rectifying past mistakes by telling the story of feminism in a different way, it is also about *shaping* the future direction of feminism, exemplifying the pragmatic and ideological effects of metaphor.

Changing the focus from FEMINISM IS A WAVE to FEMINISM IS A COMPLEX FLOW OF WATER aims to construct feminism as a less hierarchical, more decentralised movement, in which various currents and actors are recognised as equal. This, more fluid conceptualisation of feminism, as a complex flow water with rhizomatic bifurcations, has been taken up by many feminist writers, including those in my corpus, who have used the metaphor FEMINISM IS A COMPLEX FLOW OF WATER to promote a more subversive resistance than the metaphor FEMINISM IS A WAVE promotes.

In *The First Woman*, Makumbi reclaims the metaphorical connection between women and water in a positive way. For instance, Nsuuta explains to Kirabo that water cannot be owned like land because,

> "Water has no shape, it can be this, it can be that, depending on where it flows. The sea is inconstant, it cannot be tamed, it does not yield to human cultivation, it cannot be owned; you cannot draw borders on the ocean. To the ancients, women belonged with the sea like in marriage."
> […]
> "So, your grandfather's family owns most of the land in Nattetta, but does not claim Stream Nnankya or Nnambaale, the well where we collect water?"
> "No."
> "Because they can't contain it"
> (Makumbi 2021: 55–57).

Nsuuta is making a comparison between water and "the original state" that "was bred out of us" (ibid.: 41–42) by patriarchy. Water (and by implication

women) can only be tamed if it is able to be contained. Patriarchy has succeeded in containing and therefore taming most women, but not water. There is, however, hope for a *mwenkanonkano* revolution if women can rekindle the original state in them and be more like water.

In her feminist dystopian novel *Earthsong*, Suzette Haden Elgin describes a world in which women have no power, no legal rights, and are completely oppressed by men. One of the characters names a group of women the "Meandering Water Tribe". When asked why, he replies:

> Because you linguist women don't go in a straight line from A to B to C. You go this way a while, and that way a while, and this way again, instead. And you go gently and quietly. But you get there, always! *You meander, as water meanders, headed for the oceans* … and then you arrive (Haden Elgin 2019: 82).

Indeed, in the foreword, written by feminist author, Karen Lord, *Earthsong* is described as "an exploration of the power of small adjustments over a long period of time. Gradual change over generations is the key – slow and meandering, but as inevitable as waters run to the sea" (Lord 2019). The trilogy, of which *Earthsong* is the last book, spans two centuries. In a personal communication between Haden Elgin and the authors of the afterword, Susan M. Squier and Julie Vedder, Haden Elgin states that it is her

> conviction that a feminist revolution – the only kind that has any chance of succeeding – would have to meander toward its goal. Patriarchal revolutions (which always fail) go in a straight line, in a hurry; *a feminist revolution would meander, slowly. […] water is so good a metaphor for a feminist force; it wears away resistance gently but inexorably, over time, and is almost impossible to withstand. Attempts to restrain water by force (with dams and dikes and levees, for example) eventually breed water disasters; it has to be channeled* (Squier/Vedder 2019: 221).

Atwood also draws on this metaphor in *The Penelopiad*. When Penelope is trying to protect herself from her suitors' unwanted advances, she remembers the advice of her mother (who was a Naiad, or water nymph):

> Water does not resist. Water flows. […] Water is not a solid wall, it will not stop you. But water always goes where it wants to go, and nothing in the end can stand against it. Water is patient. Dripping water wears away a stone. Remember that, my child. *Remember you are half water. If you can't go through an obstacle, go around it. Water does* (Atwood 2005: 43).

> I knew it would do no good to try to eject my unwanted suitors, or to bar the palace doors against them. If I tried that, they'd turn really ugly and go on the rampage and snatch by force what they were attempting to win by persuasion. But I was the daughter of a Naiad;[6] I remembered my mother's advice to me. *Behave like water*, I told myself. Don't try to oppose them. When they try to grasp you, slip through their fingers. *Flow around them* (Atwood 2005: 107–108).

The above quotes show a more subtle kind of feminist resistance, as compared with the metaphor FEMINISM IS A WAVE. In some, if not most contexts, direct confrontation is a dangerous option for women and other, more indirect forms of resistance are more efficient. In order to avoid being contained and therefore controlled, water and feminist resistance must be fluid, changing shape and flowing around obstacles rather than crashing directly into them.

This kind of activism has also been used in other social movements and demonstrations. The demonstrations in Hong Kong in 2019–2020 in response to the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill became known as the *be water demonstrations*. In order to avoid repression, activists adopted a *be water* strategy – they were "strong like ice; fluid like water; they gathered like dew; and scattered like mist" (Anderlini 2019, cited in Matthews 2023: 1831). These water metaphors actually shaped the strategy of the protest "becoming a kind of self-positing rationale for how best to proceed" (Matthews 2023: 1831), very clearly illustrating the material consequences of the kinds of metaphors we choose to use.

On the one hand, this is good advice for feminists. When in a powerless position, use more indirect, subversive techniques to achieve your goals. On the other hand, it can also be seen as an indirect criticism of a world in which women are *obliged* to be careful about how they resist. Open resistance often results in punishment. In a world in which women were more equal, perhaps they wouldn't need to employ such tactics.

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[6] Interestingly, the word "naiad" derives from an Ancient Greek word meaning 'to flow' or 'running water' – water is not static, it is dynamic and fluid and hard to contain and therefore hard to control.

4. Conclusion

This article has focused on some of the metaphorical links between water and women and the rich and varied ways it has been used. The majority of the metaphors that I discuss in this paper are based on the conceptual metaphor A WOMAN IS WATER, which is directly or indirectly based on the CONTAINER image schema.

The ecofeminist metaphor WE ARE ALL BODIES OF WATER is partly based on the idea that the human body is a container that is made up of mostly water, but it also encourages us to see water itself as a container and ourselves as being inside this watery container, as something that is very much part of a shared hydro-commons. The goal of this metaphor is to fundamentally challenge how we conceptualise our own bodies and our relationship to water by blurring the boundaries between two different categories, human and water. In doing so it blurs the boundaries between the metaphorical and the literal. It is no longer clear whether we are dealing with a metaphor or a literal truth.

In part 3.1, I discussed how the myth 'the sea is a woman's realm' allows for the metaphors A WOMAN IS WATER and A WOMAN IS AN AQUATIC CREATURE, both of which are used to argue that women's power should be contained and limited because they are dangerous and malevolent, like the sea. If they are slippery and dubious like aquatic animals, they should be not be trusted. Women should metaphorically not claim what is not contained in their watery realm, i.e., the land and the power that comes with land ownership. The idea of containing women's power by limiting their access to power is central to these metaphors. Water and women need to be contained if they are going to be controlled and exploited. Part 3.2 discusses the metaphor A WOMAN IS A VESSEL, which is based on the idea of the womb as a container for a foetus. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, this is used as a sexist metaphor in order to exploit the life-giving potential of women as a national resource. On the other hand, in *The Deep*, although the main character Yetu is not being exploited to carry children, she does bear the burden of carrying her people's memories, sacrificing herself for the sake of others. In *The Penelopiad*, Atwood draws on this metaphor in a slightly different way. The vessels are the foetuses inside the womb, which is conceptualised as a dangerous sea. PREGNANCY IS A DANGEROUS SEA VOYAGE for both women and the foetus. In Part 3.3, I discussed how metaphors of water have been used to describe the feminist movement. The central metaphor in this part is FEMINIST

RESISTANCE IS WATER, which gives rise to two, more specific, metaphors: FEMINISM IS A WAVE and FEMINISM IS A COMPLEX FLOW OF WATER. These metaphors are based on the image schema of MOTION, but I argue that this idea of motion is in order to resist being contained and is therefore indirectly based on a CONTAINER image schema.

What unites all of the metaphors in this article is the power of water. Whether from a sexist perspective or a feminist one, water is conceptualised as an entity that is immensely powerful. Its power to create, destroy, or unite is ubiquitous. The link between water and women has been used to subordinate women, but since the middle of the 20th century, feminists have been reclaiming this connection a more strategic way, using the metaphor of waves in order to build a coherent historical narrative and more recently using other watery metaphors of complex flows in order to highlight a more open and diverse approach to feminism. In response to patriarchal oppression, some feminists have advocated subversive tactics reminiscent of the difficulty in containing water and its patient ability to wear away the most resistant of obstacles. This tactic is useful and practical but also only makes sense because we live in a world where women are supposed to conform to certain ideals and where they will be punished for direct resistance. More radically, what feminists are trying to do today is start off another epistemological revolution in the way that we conceptualise water and our relation to it, including our own bodies with the metaphor WE ARE ALL BODIES OF WATER and WATER IS A COMMON GOOD.

Like water itself, water metaphors are extremely versatile. Water exists in various forms – vapour, liquid or ice. As a wave it can crash over you, as a current it can pull you along, as a trickle it can infiltrate into all kinds of nooks and crannies, as a drip it can wear away stone. Water is visible and invisible, terrifying and calming. It moves in all directions around the globe, north, south, east, west as well as through the atmosphere and beyond the planet into the universe and as such is perhaps the ultimate shape-shifting metaphor.

Table 2[7] shows a summary of the metaphors I have looked at in this article.

[7] Table 2 is based on Kövecses (2010: 101).

Metaphors	Mappings		Entailments
	Aspects of target	**Aspects of source**	
WE ARE ALL BODIES OF WATER	Target: the human body The human body is made up of about 60% water.	Source: water Water is abundant on Earth. 70% of the Earth's surface is water. All living things are made predominantly of water and need it to survive.	We should see ourselves, not as separate from nature, but as part of it. We are not at the top of a hierarchy, but part of an interdependent rhizomatic structure. All elements in this giant living organism are dependent on each other. Polluting water = polluting humans.
A WOMAN IS WATER	Target: women The female body is (usually) capable of carrying, giving birth to and breastfeeding children. It creates and sustains life. Nnamazzi, the first woman, came from the sea. All women descended from her.	Source: water All life came from water. Water creates and sustains life. Humans need certain resources (including water) to survive. Science is the tool which will allow men to control and exploit water (e.g., dam-building projects).	Women are conceptualised as natural nurturers / care givers. It is their moral duty to provide care to others. Water is a passive resource that can and should be controlled by men. It has a duty to sustain human life and growth. Women are fickle, baffling and changeful. They cannot be trusted. Women should be metaphorically contained in the sea. They should not be able to claim land (and the power associated with land ownership).
A WOMAN IS AN AQUATIC CREATURE	Target: women	Source: aquatic creatures	Women are not to be trusted
A WOMAN IS A VESSEL	Target: women (the womb) The womb is a container for a foetus. Nations need population growth (or at least stability) to retain political and military power.	Source: a vessel A vessel is a container to carry goods/resources/ cargo over the sea	The female body is seen in a functional role as a container and carrier of babies and a national resource. It is women's duty to the nation to have babies (*The Handmaid's Tale*). The female body is a container and carrier of memories / a cultural resource (*The Deep*).

A WOMAN (THE WOMB) IS A DANGEROUS SEA	Target: a woman (the womb) Life originates in a womb. The foetus is surrounding by amniotic fluid in the womb. Pregnancy and giving birth can be dangerous and painful for both the mother and the child.	Source: a dangerous sea Life originated in the sea. Sailors go on long and perilous voyages. The sea can be dangerous.	The womb / the female body / women are not necessarily nurturing.
FEMINISM IS A WAVE	Target: feminism Feminist activity peaks at certain points in history and then activity dies down until the next cycle. Feminist history is linear. One kind of feminism succeeds the previous one and that older waves are obsolete.	Source: waves Waves are cyclical, they rise, fall, crash, dissipate. Unusually big waves occur when a force acts upon the water (wind, earthquake, etc.). Waves wash away dirt and debris.	US/UK White middle-class feminism is highlighted, while other groups and other cultures are obscured. Social movements are expected to follow the pattern of waves (rise, fall, crash, dissipate *ad infinitum*).
FEMINISM IS A COMPLEX FLOW OF WATER	Target: multiple feminisms Feminism does not have a clear beginning. It is made up of multiple and currents of thought. Feminist history is complex with multi-ple currents of thought and actors. Many women face oppression and dis-crimination. If they fight back openly and directly, they will be punished.	Source: flows of water Water does not always flow in one direction. Water flows underground as well as on the surface of the earth. When water hits an obstacle, it simply goes around it.	This metaphor highlights the multiple forms of feminism. Feminism (in the singular) becomes feminism**s** (in the plural). Different feminist currents are now more visible and seen as legitimate. When in a powerless position, subversive and fluid tactics are often more effective to achieve one's goals ("be strong like ice; be fluid like water; gather like dew; scatter like mist").

Table 2: Summary of metaphors discussed

5. Corpus

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