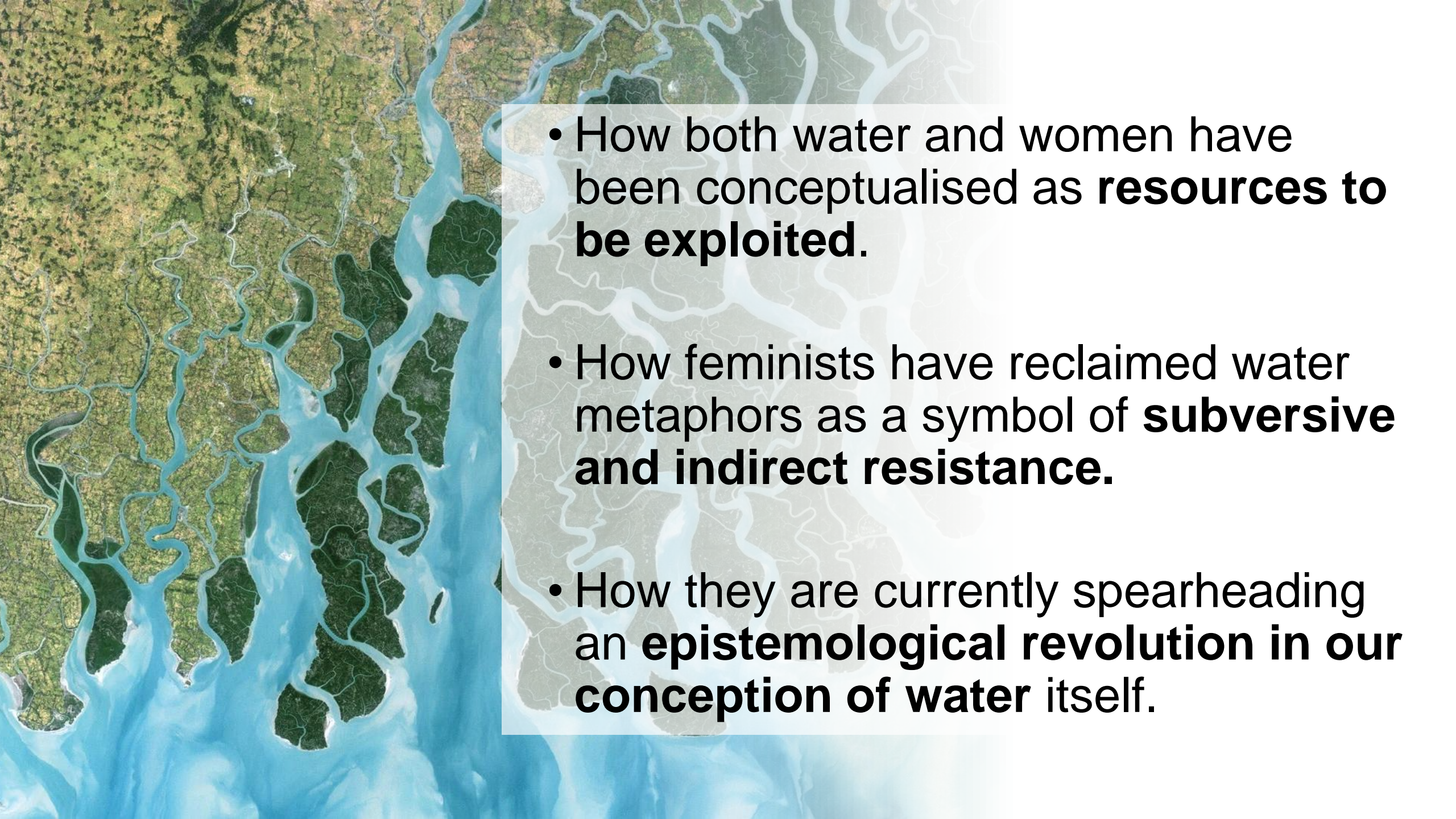


Feminist reclaiming of water metaphors

- 
- An aerial photograph of a river delta, showing a complex network of blue water channels branching out from a larger river into a green, forested landscape. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing three bullet points in black text.
- How both water and women have been conceptualised as **resources to be exploited**.
 - How feminists have reclaimed water metaphors as a symbol of **subversive and indirect resistance**.
 - How they are currently spearheading an **epistemological revolution in our conception of water** itself.



Theoretical framework:

Feminist theory + cognitive metaphor theory

Corpus:

Feminist literature + feminist historiography + critical geography articles + policy documents on water scarcity.

Methodology:

Charteris-Black (2004). *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis*.



**WATER IS
(+ NATURE in
general)
A WOMAN**

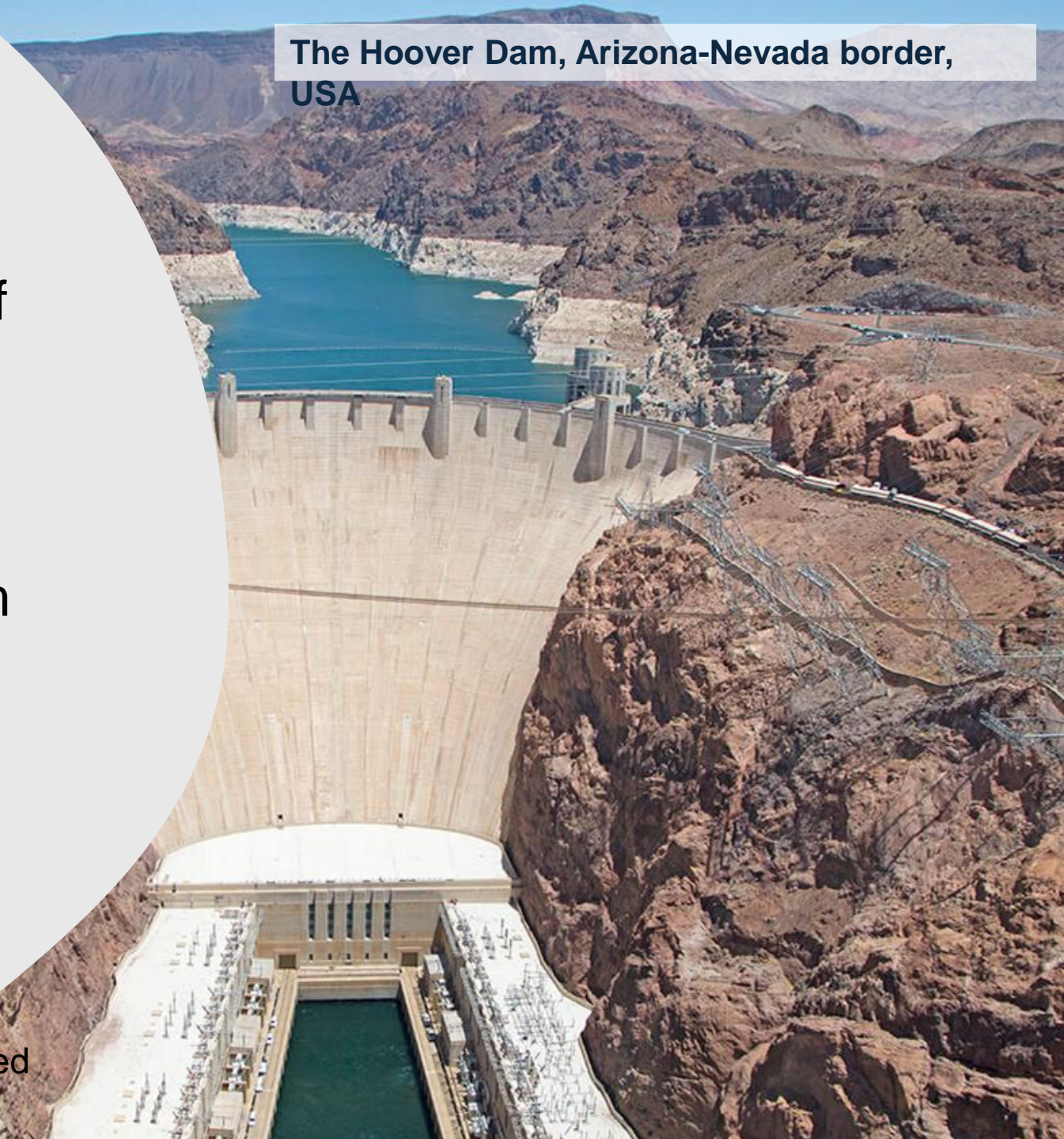
**(—> a resource to be
exploited)**

***Nature Unveiling Herself Before Science*
(1899), Louis-Ernest Barrias**

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

“the 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.”



“I can’t think of myself, my body, sometimes without seeing the skeleton: how I must appear to an electron. A cradle of life, made of bones; and within hazards, warped proteins, bad crystals jagged as glass. Women took medicines, pills, men sprayed trees, cows ate grass, all that souped-up piss flowed into the rivers.”

“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, Margaret (1985). *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

Conceptual metaphor: WATER IS A

WOMAN

Metaphor	Aspects of target (water)	Aspects of source (women / the female body)	Potential inferences
WATER (NATURE in general) IS A WOMAN (therefore SCIENCE / CULTURE IS A MAN) <i>(Nature Unveiling Herself Before Science, Barrias 1899)</i>	<p>Nature holds many secrets to be explored.</p> <p>Science is the tool which will allow men to conquer nature (e.g., dam-building projects).</p>	<p>The female body was/is a mystery to science.</p> <p>Women's behaviour is a mystery to men.</p>	<p>Women's bodies are there to be explored, enjoyed, exploited by men.</p> <p>Women are passive (men are active).</p> <p>Women are intellectually inferior, more intuitive (men are more intellectual, more logical, more scientific).</p>
WATER IS A NATIONAL RESOURCE "my body [...]. A cradle of life [...]. I am a national resource." <i>(Atwood (1985). The Handmaid's Tale)</i>	<p>Water is a national resource that has a duty to sustain human life and growth.</p>	<p>The female body is (usually) capable of carrying and giving birth to children.</p> <p>Nations need population growth (or at least stability) to retain political and military power.</p>	<p>It is women's duty to the nation to have babies.</p>

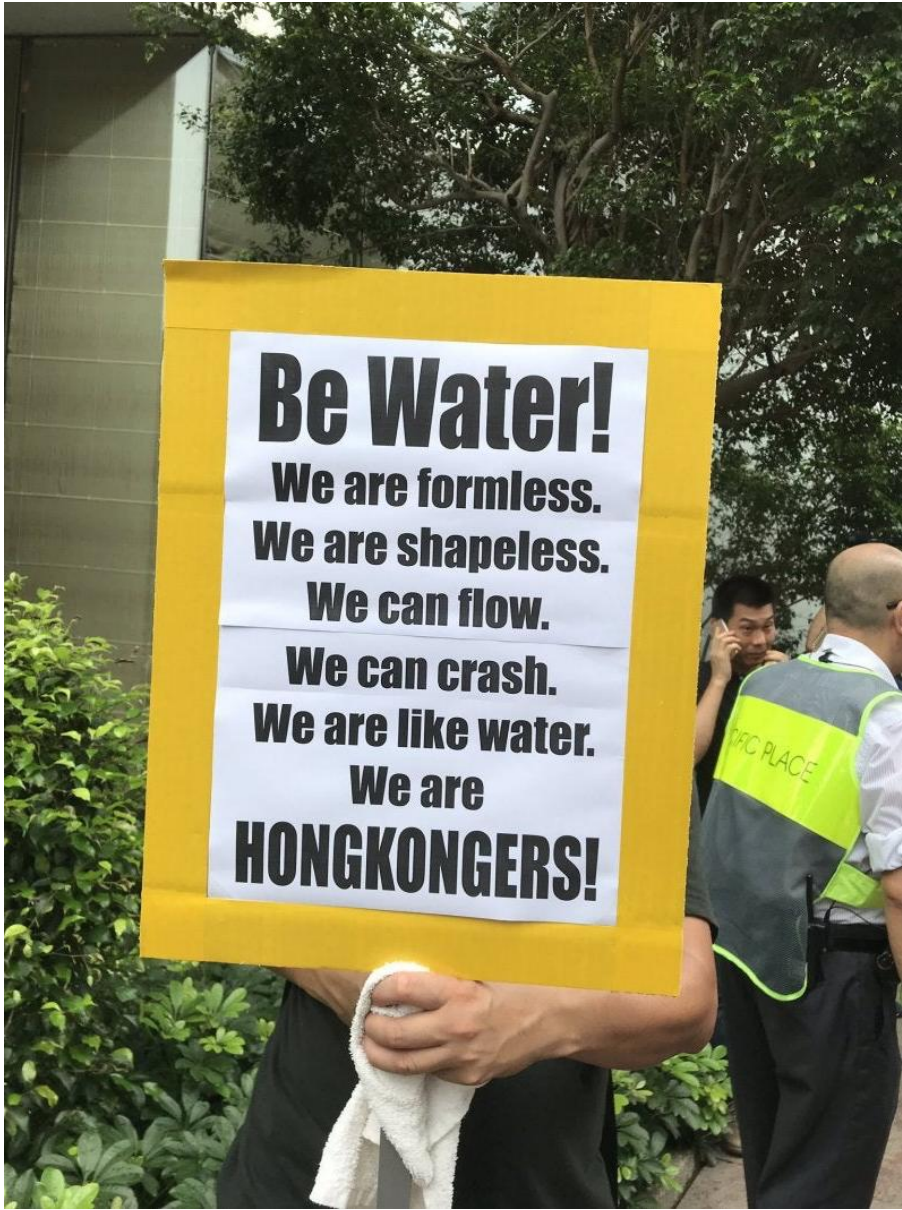
FEMINIST RESISTANCE IS WATER

“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, Suzette (1994). *Earthsong*.

“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; 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, Margaret (2005). *The Penelopiad*.



Conceptual metaphor: FEMINIST RESISTANCE IS WATER

Metaphor	Aspects of source (water)	Aspects of target (feminism)	Potential inferences
FEMINIST RESISTANCE IS WATER ("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). <i>The Penelopiad</i>)	Water is sometimes difficult to hold / contain.	Many women face oppression and discrimination. If they fight back openly and directly, they will be punished.	When in a powerless position, adopt subversive tactics to achieve one's goals.

WATER IS A COMMODITY



“We know water is the source of life. But it can also be a **source for portfolio diversification**. Like gold and oil, **water is a commodity** — and it happens to be rather scarce nowadays. So, as with any other scarcity, the water shortage creates investment opportunities.”

<https://www.investopedia.com/articles/06/water.asp>

HUMANS ARE BODIES OF WATER

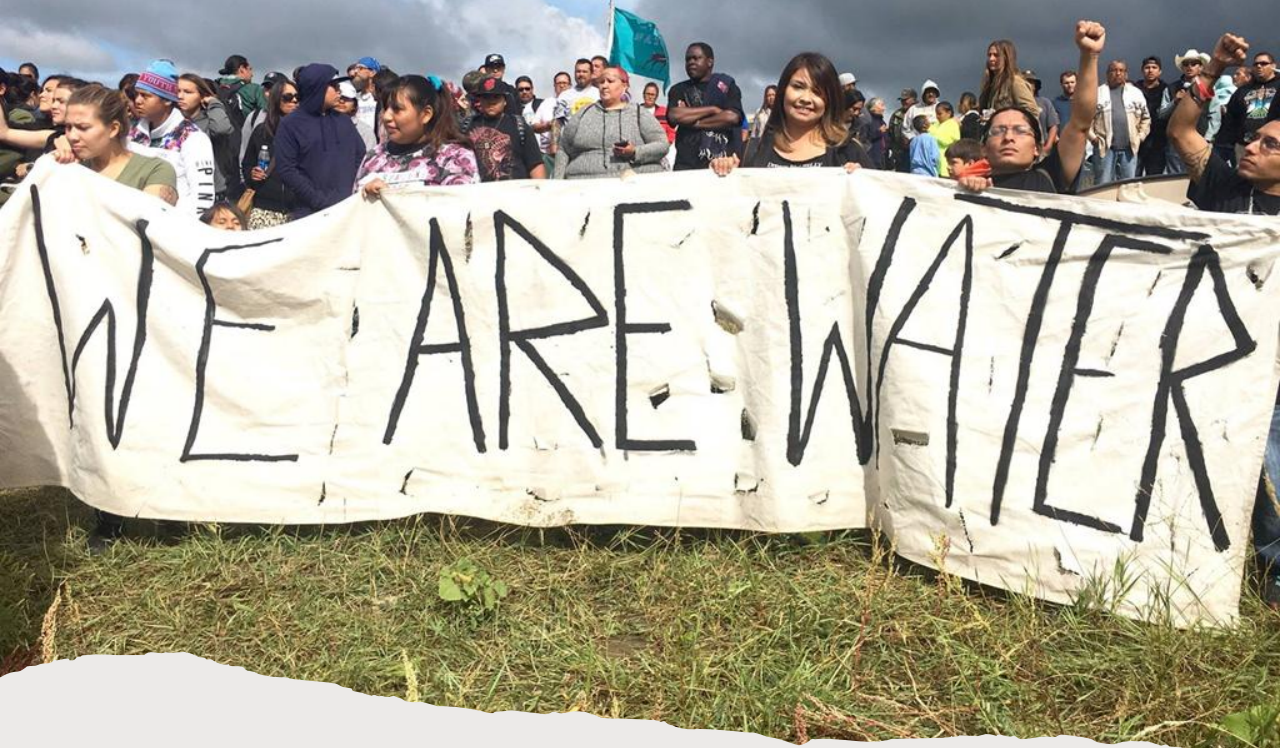
“My body — like yours — primarily comprises water. My existence as a body of water is a biological fact, but living my embodiment as watery — embedded in a world that I share with other human, animal, vegetable, geophysical and meteorological bodies that also comprise water — has other implications as well. We are all bodies of water.”

Neimanis, Astrida (2013: 24). *Bodies of Water*.



Standing Rock, Dakota,
USA

Ireland



**WATER IS
A UNIFIER**

Conceptual metaphors:

WATER IS A COMMODITY + HUMANS ARE WATER + WATER IS A UNIFIER

Metaphor	Aspects of source	Aspects of target	Potential inferences
WATER IS A COMMODITY ("it can also be a source of portfolio diversification" Investopedia)	Commodities can be contained, bought and sold.	If water can be contained (put into bottles, pushed through pipes...) it can be bought and sold.	Water is something that can be owned, therefore bought and sold. If you can't afford it, you can't have any. It's not a right.
HUMANS ARE BODIES OF WATER ("We all bodies of water". Niemanis (2013: 24). <i>Bodies of Water</i>)	Water is abundant on Earth. All living things are made predominantly of water and need it to survive.	The human body is made up of about 60% water.	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 rhizomic structure. All elements in this giant living organism are dependent on each other. Polluting water = polluting humans = polluting water...
WATER IS A UNIFIER (Standing Rock and	Something that creates a social link between humans and makes us	Water is able to bond with many different elements.	Water plays an active role in society. It fulfils all kinds of important social and cultural roles

CONCLUSIO N

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