(In)Secure in the Anthropocene

An exploration of the role of emotions and rationality in discursive responses to ontological insecurity

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Abstract

To be able to persist as humans we need a story that gives a sense of stability and ontological security, but this sense of stability is threatened by the Anthropocene through environmental degradation, the destabilisation of the nature-culture divide, and discursive conflicts between rational and alternative (emotional) discourses. However, the role of ontological security in human-nonhuman relationships has been underrepresented in research, especially in the context of discourse analyses. Therefore, this thesis explored how we see responses to ontological insecurity in discourses regarding nature conservation in the Netherlands. Specifically, the articulation of the threat, fantasmatic elements, and the role of emotions and rationality were investigated in these discursive responses. This was done through a qualitative exploration of societal expressions about the climate and biodiversity crises by analysing newspaper articles, focus groups and interviews. The dataset consisted of a snapshot of views on the climate and biodiversity crises in Dutch society between March 2023 and March 2024. Data generation through newspaper article analysis, focus groups and interviews has allowed for methodological triangulation. A combination of Foucauldian discourse analysis, critical fantasy studies, and critical discourse analysis created the opportunity to take a closer look at power-rationality configurations, fantasmatic elements and how and by whom reality is constructed. An experimental musical analysis was done to offer space for both an emotive and cognitive analysis. Five different storylines have been described and grouped into three discourses in response to the ontological insecurity triggered by the Anthropocene. The first discourse is a technocratic response, which desires controllable and adaptive nature, and delegitimises alarmism as a response. The second discourse relies on nuance and putting ontological insecurity into perspective beyond the human timescale. The third discourse is the most emotional and visibly ontologically insecure. It emphasises the relational and intrinsic value of nature and is highest in fantasmatic qualities through its articulation of desire and beautific and horrific scenarios as a way of repressing insecurity. Whilst the technocratic discourse eases insecurity by reiterating the nature-culture divide and control over nature, the nuanced and emotional discursive responses contain a larger amount of insecurity as they contain reflexivity and focus on a changing ontology. This research has shown the importance of the roles of emotions and rationality in delineating discursive responses, as ontological (in)security is inherently an emotional phenomenon which affects the way we construct meaning. A better understanding of the role of emotions and ontological insecurity in the way humanity deals with ecological threats can in turn help foster embedded and just political and societal responses to the climate and biodiversity crisis.

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century is a time in which we are faced with scarcity of critical resources, financial instability, environmental degradation, inequity within and across countries, and global threats to the resilience of the Earth (Steffen et al., 2011; Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). Human activities now rival global geophysical processes, as atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide have passed the threshold for anthropogenic climate change (Steffen et al., 2011; Hamilton, 2017). Moreover, rapid biodiversity loss with significant influence of human activities is pointing to a sixth mass extinction (Hamilton, 2017). In other words, the twenty-first century is a time in which we are faced with an unprecedented situation of uncertainty and degradation (Steffen et al., 2011; Hamilton, 2017). We find ourselves facing the Anthropocene.

The system-wide turbulence of the Anthropocene does not only threaten our physical and social-ecological capacity to persist within ever changing environments, crises such as climate change and rapid biodiversity loss also confront us with existential questions (Feick, 2022; Folke et al., 2021). These existential questions can in turn threaten our sense of safety in the world (Giddens, 1991; Browning & Joenniemi, 2017; Feick, 2022; Folke et al., 2021). Humanity's sense of safety in the world can be understood through the lens of ontological security, which entails a biographical continuity and cognitive consistency (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). Ontological (in)security concerns not only the nature of being, but also the relation between humans and the external (non-human) world (Giddens, 1991). The natural world is part of the way people feel ontologically secure, where land and seascapes can serve as a context and source of ontological security (Karlsson & Dale, 2019). The ecological crises of the Anthropocene can lead to a loss of or change in these sources, and threaten our conceptions of humanity and sense of human 'self' in a stable and continuous world.

The threats to ontological security triggered by the ecological crises of the Anthropocene challenge the Western separation of humanity from nature. The Paradox of the Anthropocene argues that the Anthropocene confronts humanity with the need to secure itself from oneself, as human activities significantly contribute to the climate and biodiversity crises. It is not the external world from which we need to be protected, but the threats we create ourselves, by which we make humanity both the subject and object of security (Hamilton, 2017). This paradox adds to the existential discontinuity of the twenty-first century, where humanity, ontological security and non-human nature are entangled. This entanglement destabilises the narrative of separation between humans and nature on which much security thinking was built and confronts us with questions of what it means to be human (Hamilton, 2017; Fagan, 2017).

The way humanity gives meaning to existential continuity and what it means to be human can be expressed and analysed through discourses. Narratives and discourses are fundamental means for creating a sense of meaningful and stable existence for humans (Lynch, 2017; Eberle, 2017; Rose, 2004). Although there is no clear overview of what discourses exist currently, a variety of narratives and discourses within nature conservation has been identified before. These include greenspeak, sustainable development, ecosystem services and ecological modernisation (Von Essen, 2017; Dryzek, 2022). Since the Anthropocene destabilises many narratives and discourses, it is expected to see shifts and new narratives that illustrate the search for a way to cope with the challenges posed by the Anthropocene (Marinelli, 2018). In the Netherlands, Buijs et al. (2022) identified such a shift from an 'Ecology First' discourse into a 'People Inclusive' discourse, which pays more attention to societal engagement in nature conservation (Buijs et al., 2022). In addition, three new and diverse discourses arose: 'Green Economy' (with a focus on capitalising ecosystem services for financial purposes), 'Relational Nature' (emphasising people's connection to

nature), and ‘Democratic Nature’ (combining intrinsic and relational values of nature) (Buijs et al., 2022).

Discourses can offer a sense of ontological security by constructing stories that stabilise the connection between the subject and their idea of reality and identity. Fantasies are the quality of a discourse that helps ease existential anxiety and gain stability by showing the subject their place in the world (Eberle, 2017). The split between humans and nature is such a fantasy, which is contingent and never complete (Behagel & Mert, 2021). This means that it can be understood as an expression of creating splits between oneself and the world and attributing joy and anxiety to outer objects (Behagel & Mert, 2021). However, the Paradox of the Anthropocene destabilises this fantasmatic nature-culture divide, which can lead to a sense of ontological insecurity as it can lead to the subject not knowing their place in the world anymore. Since the function of a fantasy is to cover existential voids in the subject and make them feel more ontologically secure, it is to be expected that fantasies play a significant role in the discursive responses to the insecurity triggered by the Anthropocene. In other words, if the fantasmatic human-nature split does not offer security anymore, it is likely that another fantasy will try to cover the insecurity that comes with that destabilisation. A responsive fantasy could for example be one that thinks of nature and culture as intertwined, which is found in relational and emotional discourses. At the same time, re-claiming one’s identity might be easier and more attractive than facing the truth of the Paradox: the destruction of ourselves as a species (Remling, 2023) and easier than adopting another discourse. This could result in discursive responses trying to re-claim humanity’s place in the world as separate from nature. Whilst the fantasmatic responses to the ontological insecurity triggered by the Anthropocene are not clear yet, they might explain the persistent attractiveness *or* the possible disappearance of hegemonic discourses.

Within conservation discourses, a (scientific) rationality discourse has been dominant in Western cultures. This discourse holds expertise as necessary for producing knowledge, where expertise is seen as speaking truth to power in a linear and technocratic way (Kleinschmit, Böcher & Giessen, 2009). Within rationalised discourses, legibility is of great importance, which is understood as external, objective, shared and visible (Buijs & Lawrence, 2013). A (scientific) rationality discourse contains a positivist (scientific) approach that assumes *the* truth is out there. This dominance of a rationality discourse and the tendency to neglect and reject emotional components in nature conservation is deeply rooted in the philosophy of natural sciences in Western cultures. Nature has been objectified and rationalised since the 18th century, mirroring the separation of science from religion, art and culture (Buijs & Lawrence, 2013). This rationalisation consists of several linked developments present in Western cultures which also affect the way nature is viewed. The development of science and technology led to the idea that nature is predictable and controllable, the expansion of capitalism led to the ‘rational mastery’ of the market, formal hierarchical organisation led to rationally organised action instead of social action, and the formal legal system led to managing social conflict through predicting and calculating the consequences of social action (Adams, 1997). These broader developments are reflected in the practices of nature conservation: nature is controlled through management plans and the relations between humans and non-human nature are organised through the boundaries of nature reserves (Adams, 1997).

Nowadays, a development is seen where more emphasis and acknowledgement is given to the importance of emotions in nature conservation (Buijs & Lawrence, 2013; Halla & Laine, 2022). Discourses that account for the emotionality of nature and nature conservation include concepts such as place attachment and connectedness to nature (Buijs & Lawrence, 2013). These discourses contain relational values of nature, as opposed to the often instrumental values present in a rationality discourse (Mattijssen et al., 2020). However, the hegemonic rationality discourse still leads to the de-legitimation of alternative, more emotional constructions of meaning and reality (Van den Born et al., 2018; Buijs & Lawrence, 2013; Von Essen, 2017; Leipold et al., 2019). This is often done through discursive boundary work,

where distinctions are made between 'scientific' and 'rational' claims, and 'emotional', 'not objective' ideas as a way to gain support for one's own discourse (Metze & Dodge, 2016). In the Netherlands, previous nature conservation debates have shown that civilians often approach the debate from emotions and values, whilst policy-makers focus on knowledge (Haas, Donders & Mattijssen, 2019). The dismissal of emotional discourses could lead to policies and political debates that do not reflect the values in society. Rationalisation can also lead to social conflicts between different groups in nature conservation (Buijs & Lawrence, 2013; Von Essen, 2017). When these conflicts between different discourses threaten the belief that one's own story, or discourse, is a good one, it can lead to a feeling of ontological insecurity (Kinnvall, 2014). This in turn, can lead to a need for seeking reaffirmation of one's own identity by drawing closer to a collective that is able to reduce this insecurity (Kinnvall, 2014), which can lead to further distance and conflict between different discursive groups.

To sum up, to be able to persist as humans we need a story that gives a sense of stability and ontological security, but this sense of stability is threatened by the Anthropocene. First, environmental degradation leads to the loss of land and seascapes which serve as a source and context for ontological security. Second, the destabilisation of the human-nature divide threatens our sense of what it means to be human in a stable and continuous world. Third, discursive conflicts between rational and alternative (emotional) discourses can threaten the belief in one's own story. Together, these threats create an arena in which ontological insecurity seems to be inescapable. Previous research has already shown shifts in conservation discourses from rational to more emotional discourses, and from an emphasis on instrumental values to more acknowledgement of intrinsic and relational values, but these shifts have not been related to ontological (in)security. In addition, there is an increasing interest in the way the ecological crises lead to worry, ecological grief, and anxiety (Ojala et al., 2021). However, there is a need to relate this anxiety to deeper dimensions related to existential questions (Pihkala, 2020). Moreover, this existential anxiety is rarely discussed in a political context and little research has been done on the role of ontological (in)security in the way we construct human-nonhuman relationships (Banham, 2020).

This research aims to explore how people respond to the existential anxiety created by the climate and biodiversity crisis through a political lens. This is done by connecting psychoanalysis and political ecology through ontological security, discourse and critical fantasy studies. Since ontological security is inherently an emotional phenomenon, attention is also paid to the role of rationality and emotions in the discursive responses to the Anthropocene. In order to examine the production of truths, how and by whom reality is constructed, the role of emotions, rationality and desire in their wider political context (Hajer, 2006; Leipold et al., 2019), a combination of Foucauldian discourse analysis, critical fantasy studies and critical discourse analysis was used. I argue that combining discourse analysis with ontological security allows for a novel and insightful analysis of the way society faces the challenges of the Anthropocene and constructs meaning in relation to the natural world, whilst accounting for power relations, rationality and emotionality. This can in turn serve as a starting point for analysing the performativity of discourses and for investigating whether policies are reflective of the values and concerns in society. The main research question that has followed from the previously introduced problem is: *How do we see a response to the ontological insecurity triggered by the Anthropocene in discourses regarding nature conservation in the Netherlands?* The sub-questions that will support answering the main research question are:

1. How are the threats of the Anthropocene to ontological security with regards to nature discursively articulated?
2. What psychic/fantasmatic responses to threats to ontological security are present in social groups (environmental policy makers, NGO employees, scientists and students) in the Netherlands?
3. What is the role of rationality and emotions in these discursive responses?

First, the theoretical background and conceptual framework used to answer these questions will be explained in depth. The conceptual framework is then translated into research methods, which consisted of a textual and musical analysis of newspaper articles, focus groups and interviews. The resulting information will be presented in five storylines. In the discussion, the different sub-questions will be answered using these results, and the answers will be placed in the context of literature regarding liquid/reflexive modernity, the Great Divide, and environmental justice. Finally, a conclusion is given that places the answers to the research questions in a societal context with recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter will first discuss the different theoretical concepts that are used in this research and their purpose in achieving the research aim. Afterwards, the conceptual framework will relate these different concepts to each other and explain their place in the methods and results of this research.

2.1 Ontological security

The psychoanalytic term ontological security was first coined by psychologist R.D. Laing, and entered International Relations studies through the work of Anthony Giddens (Gustafson & Krichel-choi, 2020), after which it has entered other domains and crossed disciplinary borders. Giddens defined ontological security as a sense of safety in the world and a feeling of trust towards others (Giddens, 1991). This entails the need for cognitive consistency and biographical continuity, especially in a world destabilised by late modernity (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). Put more simply, ontological security is about feeling stable and continuous in time, and feeling secure in 'being' in the world. It is an emotional phenomenon, rather than cognitive, rooted in the unconscious (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998).

In order to gain this sense of security, individuals tend to seek safety in what Giddens called 'routines', or in other practices that help maintain coherent narratives of the self (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). Routines can be understood as following a familiar course of action, which increases the predictability of daily life (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). At the societal level, ontological security is approached through cultural and institutional constructs, and shared narratives and stories (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). Through routines, narratives and other practices, one wants to gain basic trust and reflexivity which are necessary to move forward in life and the world, despite its changes, ups and downs (Browning & Joenniemi, 2017). In other words, it is about feeling like you are safely strapped in when you are on a rollercoaster ride: you might get tossed around and take unexpected turns, but you have trust in being able to continue and stay on the ride.

To feel ontologically secure can thus be described as having the capacity to cope with uncertainty and change (Browning & Joenniemi, 2017). It is about having confidence and trust that the world is how it seems to be and having answers to fundamental existential questions (Giddens, 1991), such as: who am I? How can I know the world? These existential questions concern the nature of existence, finitude and human life, the experience of others, and the continuity of self-identity (Shani, 2017; Giddens, 1991). Finitude and human life refer to the existential contradiction of humans being part of nature, whilst separating ourselves from it based on our sentience and reflexivity (Shani, 2017; Giddens, 1991). This separation (which is present in Western cultures, but less so or not at all in others), is destabilised and increasingly contested, as indicated by the Paradox of the Anthropocene. Existential questions such as: 'what does it mean to be human?' become more difficult to answer.

Giddens himself also argues that ways through which ontological security can be 'attained' have been threatened by the rapid changes inherent of the modern world (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). Science and reason have undermined previous stable systems of meaning, such as religion, whilst scientific claims themselves are contingent due to doubt and questioning being the foundations of the scientific method. According to Giddens, claims to truth (and answers to existential questions) in modernity have thus become inherently unstable (Browning & Joenniemi, 2017). The anxiety this brings along can in turn threaten ontological security. Laing identified three types of anxiety that can lead to ontological insecurity. First, engulfment refers to a sense of loss of identity experienced relating to others, which is often responded to with isolation. Second, implosion refers to the terror and emptiness the individual experiences as the world seems to be able to implode at any moment and destroy

all identity. Third, petrification is the sense of being rendered a thing, without subjectivity. A common strategy to tackle petrification is turning 'the other' into a thing: to depersonalise them (Shani, 2017; Laing, 1994). To feel ontologically *in*secure can then be described as fearing that you are on a rollercoaster ride without any safety measures keeping you in your seat, or that you are not a subject on the ride but an object as part of the ride, or that the entire rollercoaster will implode.

Although I have described both ontological security and insecurity as separate, it is important to note that I do not understand ontological security as a binary, fixed state, where one is either ontologically insecure or secure and that one is the opposite of the other. Instead, I assume there to be a continuum between ontological security and insecurity where individuals can feel both secure and insecure simultaneously (Banham, 2020; Bondi, 2014). Also, I follow the existentialist perspective which assumes that anxiety caused by the contingency of human existence cannot be eliminated (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). Feeling ontologically secure or insecure is thus not about the absence or presence of anxiety, but about how well an individual can manage existential anxiety.

Now that I have explored the foundations of ontological security, I will place it into the context of nature conservation. In this thesis, I will use ontological security as a conceptual lens for understanding subjectivity that focuses on managing anxiety in self-constitution (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020) whilst facing the ecological problems and challenges of the Anthropocene. The management of this anxiety is not done in isolation, but is part of a process of identity construction in relation to others (Kinnvall, 2004). These 'others' are not necessarily human, but the relationships that inform the 'trust' as part of ontological security also include nonhuman species, ecosystems, and objects (Banham, 2020). The natural world is part of the way people feel ontologically secure, and the existential questions related to ontological security also concern the relation between humans and the external (non-human) world (Giddens, 1991). Land and seascapes can serve as a context and source of ontological security (Karlsson & Dale, 2019) through the meanings attached to them (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). Ontological security is then not solely about self-preservation, but also about the wellbeing of others and the importance of relationality, which are important aspects of nature conservation and its discourses (Nicholsen, 2003). By using ontological security to place individuals in the wider natural and discursive context in which they act, I can more effectively unmask the structural relations through which discourses are framed (Shani, 2017; Kinnvall, 2014). This way of using ontological security as a 'thick signifier' acknowledges the relational and contextual aspect of security and its discourse, and the way discourses interact and affect other individuals or groups (Kinnvall, 2004; Huysmans, 1998). I will further explain the conceptual relation between ontological security and discourses when discussing fantasies.

To operationalise the concept of ontological security in the analysis and be able to answer sub-question 1, the framework of Banham (2020) was used. She proposed six characteristics that reflect ontological security, which I altered to apply to nature conservation:

1. Nature as symbolic of material constancy;
2. Nature as symbolic of routine and ritual;
3. Nature as symbolic of escape and refuge from the surveillance and threats of the contemporary world or built environment;
4. Nature as symbolic of a consistent self-narrative;
5. Nature as symbolic of the nonhuman, through which ontological understandings are constructed;
6. Nature as symbolic of the future and human vulnerability.

In the analysis, these characteristics were used to offer focus to the analysis of the discursive articulation of the threats to ontological security with regards to the ecological crises.

2.2 Discourse Analysis

When using discourse analysis as a method of analysis, it is vital to also discuss the philosophical premises and theoretical foundations that cannot be detached from the methodological aspects of discourse analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011). Here, I will explore these philosophical premises as well as weigh up different discourse approaches against each other and identify what kind of knowledge each approach will contribute to my research (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011).

As the foundation of my understanding of discourse, I will follow Michel Foucault, one of the key people of discourse analysis, who defined discourse as a limited number of statements which belong to the same discursive formation and for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined (Foucault, 1972). He follows a social constructionist philosophy that knowledge is not a reflection of reality. Instead, truth is constructed and different regimes of knowledge determine what is seen as truth (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011). The construction of truth is not just done through written and spoken language. Reality and truth are constructed both through language and other social practices in order to create meaning (Foucault, 1973; Leipold et al., 2019). Hajer therefore defined discourse analysis as: 'the examination of argumentative structure in documents and other written or spoken statements as well as the practices through which these utterances are made' (Hajer, 2006, pp. 66). A discourse is then defined as: 'an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices' (Hajer, 2006, pp. 67). Simply put, a discourse is a particular way of talking about and understanding the world, where we access or approach reality through language (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011). These definitions of discourse and discourse analysis will also be used in this thesis, and my assumption is that if language and other social practices can construct reality, they will also reflect feelings of (in)security in this reality.

Foucault and Hajer (among others), understand discourse as more than a mere communicative exchange, and see it as a complex entity relating to ideology, strategy, language and practice. This complex entity is shaped by power and knowledge (Sharp & Richardson, 2001). I will therefore also explore what is understood by power and knowledge and their role in shaping discourses and the construction of reality. This helps me understand current hegemonic discourses within nature conservation, and their construction of what is seen as rational, or 'the truth'.

2.2.1 Power, Knowledge and Rationality

Power relations are essential in the interpretation of discourses, as a discourse is a combination of repeated statements, practices and power-rationality configurations (Jensen, 1997). The relationship between power and rationality, according to Foucault, can help us understand which arguments, whether rational and/or irrational, are appropriated as 'truth' or reality through the exercise of power (Sharp & Richardson, 2001). Power is thus not seen by Foucault as merely oppressive, but productive: power creates discourse, knowledge, bodies and subjectivities (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011; Foucault, 1980).

Foucault argued that there is no universal rationality, but there are specific different rationalities. There are multiple ways of doing things, but what justifies doing one thing over the other, or what makes a specific rationality dominant, is power (Foucault, 1980; Flyvbjerg, 2000). When discussing the dominance of a scientific rationality discourse, it is not so much the external powers imposing themselves on science that are important, but the effects of the internal regime of power within scientific statements (Foucault, 1980). Science, the

construction of truth and nature conservation are all expressions of power, and people become subjected to this power (Foucault, 1980).

Rose and Miller (1992) have offered more insights on the power of knowledge and expertise and its construction of truth. They argue that institutions and bodies of knowledge that assert a certain expertise play an important role in the strengthening and legitimization of a political power (Rose & Miller, 1992). Environmental organisations have the power to shape knowledge and the truth about nature, and through that formulate its management (Rutherford, 2007). The science behind these environmental organisations and their discourses thus works as 'a power/knowledge regime, producing the truth about nature, the way it can be told, and by whom' (Rutherford, 2007, pp. 298). Discourses within the environmental context, can then be framed as 'complex bodies of values, thoughts and practices, including communicative acts and scientific knowledge alongside unspoken actions, and the deployment of lay knowledge within webs of power relations' (Sharp & Richardson, 2001, p. 198).

2.2.2 The subject

Within the social constructionist discourse approaches, the subject is seen as socially, culturally and historically situated (Sharp & Richardson, 2001). According to Foucault, the subject is created in discourses and the individual becomes a medium for culture and its language (Foucault, 1972; Kvale, 1995; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011). Foucault, as well as his teacher Louis Althusser, regarded the subject as decentred, where all aspects of the social system are controlled by ideology (such as capitalism). Althusser specifically assumes that the subject is unable to resist the position the subject is placed in by ideology (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011). Here, I do not agree with this 'dominant ideology thesis', but follow the contemporary consensus in discourse analysis that individuals are more capable of resisting ideologies. Specifically, I take from the Critical Discourse Approach where individuals are both shaped by and shape language and discourse, and thus have more agency than in the assumption of Althusser, where the individual is determined by structures (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011). By assuming the subject has agency, I also assume that subjects have the ability to resist a position of ontological insecurity and shape their discursive responses to this position.

2.3 Fantasy: linking discourse and ontological security

So far, I have discussed ontological security and discourse analysis mostly as separate concepts and theories. I will now use (political) fantasies as a concept that connects ontological security with discourses. The theoretical background of fantasies builds on Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, which argues that there is constitutive incompleteness and a permanent lacking that marks the subject (Glynos, 2021). Lacan assumes that subjects do not have a singular identity, but engage in practices of identification in order to cover this permanent lacking, capture a continuity of self-identity, and gain a sense of ontological security (Browning & Joenniemi, 2017). Such practices of identification can take place through discourses, but in order for a discourse to become an object of long-term identification, it needs to 'stick' or be attractive to its audience (Remling, 2023).

Political Discourse Theory uses fantasies to explain how and why ideology behind a discourse 'sticks', or why it grips the subject (Behagel & Mert, 2021). Here, ideology is not about ideational content such as socialism, but refers to the way subjects engage, emotionally invest and identify with ideas and discourses (Glynos, 2021). Fantasies can be seen as stories through which the subject can cover ontological voids, and have the function to stabilise the connection between subjects and social orders and the subjects' sense of

identity and reality (Eberle, 2017). The stabilisation of social realities created by fantasies is not politically neutral, but interconnected with power and exclusion. The desire for ontological security can lead to the construction and preservation of collective identities. An example of such a collective is the state, in which often the demographically, culturally, or politically dominant identities are present (Greaves, 2018). However, by attaching to and enforcing a particular (collective) identity in order to gain stability, it can in turn lead to the perpetuation of the exclusion of other identities (Eberle, 2017). Trying to gain ontological security (through fantasies) thus has political consequences, and fantasies can help to illuminate the power dynamics behind these consequences. In the context of this thesis, fantasies can thus help me tie the quest for ontological security to hegemonic discourses (such as the rationality discourse) and power imbalances.

Desire is an important aspect of fantasies, and fantasies can be seen as frames through which the attractions of enjoyment, desire, and threats become legible for the subject (Glynos, 2021). Within a discourse, fantasies are narratives that show the subjective desire for wholeness and stability which is transformed into a scenario that gives the subject a feeling of ontological security (Eberle, 2017). This feeling of enjoyment and of an imaginary wholeness allows for the 'stickiness' or the grip of a discourse (Remling, 2023). What distinguishes fantasies from other narratives within discourses, is that there is an object (such as a future scenario) of desire, and the object giving a sense of ontological security, is never fully attainable. Additionally, fantasies tend to be transgressive of social and political norms, and can undermine identities (Behagel & Mert, 2021). To continue with the analogy of the rollercoaster, if feeling ontologically secure is about feeling strapped in for the ride, a fantasy can act as your safety belt.

Synthesising the previously stated points, fantasies are the quality of a discourse that makes it stick, as they help us make sense of and persist in an ambiguous world which confronts us with existential anxiety. These stories translate the unattainable, existential desire to become 'whole' (as a result of our permanent lacking) into a seemingly more practical, empirical desire for certain infeasible 'objects' (for example: political goals such as freedom for all). These empirical objects present in the social world, then embed the subject in the social world as well. Fantasies create a loop, as the object that was supposed to fill our existential void is unattainable as well, for which narrative justifications will be sought to why this is the case, creating new fantasies (Eberle, 2017). This loop illustrates the connection and dependence between ontological security, fantasy and emotions, as (existential) anxiety provokes the construction of narratives, and fantasmatic narratives promise to help overcome this anxiety and lead to ontological security (see Eberle, 2017 for a more extensive explanation of the connection between ontological security and fantasy). Relating this back to the Anthropocene, it can thus be expected that the destabilisation of the fantasmatic nature-culture split will be responded to by another fantasmatic narrative, in order to regain stability in the world.

I argue that adding political fantasies as a concept enriches my theoretical framework and helps me understand discursive responses to ontological (in)security. Whilst Foucauldian discourse analysis allows me to analyse knowledge-power systems and dominant discourses, it offers me little insight into why certain discourses take hold and how they are handled at the level of the individual subject, which are important aspects that influence ontological security (Remling, 2023). Political fantasies help me fill this gap.

2.3.1 Heuristic devices & storylines

Several heuristic devices and sensitising concepts were used to aid the discourse analysis by offering a focus and simplification of the data analysis. Floating signifiers, empty signifiers, nodal points, narratives and fantasies were used as elements of the discursive responses for

sub-question 1 and 2. Laclau and Mouffe understand floating signifiers as an indicator of an order of discourse. For example, ‘nature conservation’ can be seen as a floating signifier, when different discourses define nature conservation in their own way: it is hard to determine a fixed meaning of nature conservation (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). An empty signifier can be seen as one step further, where the signifier is devoid of content. Nodal points then serve as a central term around which other indicators or signs are organised. They gain meaning through the signs around them. Questions that are relevant are then: do different discursive responses to ontological insecurity define these nodal points in different ways? Do they become floating signifiers? Which understanding is taken for granted across different discourses? (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Narratives and fantasies are not single signifiers, but entail certain storylines within a discourse. A narrative can be understood as a story with a plot, including the past (with an initial order), the present (with a problem disrupting the initial order), and a future (with a solution that reestablishes the order) (Eberle, 2017). Fantasies are a type of narrative, but with additional characteristics: desire, ontological security and transgression (Eberle, 2017).

In order to go from these heuristic devices to a comprehensive result, the heuristic devices and sensitising concepts were organised in repetitive patterns of signifiers in chains of signification (Lapping & Glynos, 2018). In other words, combinations of signifiers, narratives, fantasmatic qualities, emotions and rationality that repetitively occurred together were shaped into storylines. As mentioned before, narratives are often structured into an initial order, a problem disrupting that initial order, and a solution that reestablishes the order. This structure was adapted to this research and resulted in the following:

1. What is the perceived threat to ontological security?/How is the threat articulated?
2. What aspects of ontological security are threatened?
3. What is the solution? What is seen as the Obstacle to this solution?

For each storyline found in the data, these three questions were used to describe how the storyline gives meaning to the world, and to what aspects meaning is given. In addition, when the storyline contained fantasmatic qualities, attention was paid to the beautific side of the fantasy (the scenario which was idealised, promising an imaginary wholeness), the horrific side of the fantasy (a disaster scenario) (Eberle, 2019), and the Obstacle or threatening Other. The Obstacle can be understood as the one crucial element that prevents the realisation of one’s fantasy. The realisation of one’s fantasmatic desire is inherently impossible, but the Obstacle, which is often in the form of a threatening Other, creates the impression that the realisation of one’s fantasy is still potentially possible (Glynos, 2011).

2.4 Emotions

The emotions that will be analysed in the analysis as part of sub-question 3 include both positive and negative emotions, and are defined as reactions that occur as a response to significant relationships with others or the environment (Buijs & Lawrence, 2013; Frijda, 1986). Emotions can be (re)constructed in discourses, whether these emotions are seen as relevant grounds for argumentation is part of the power relations between actors (Burkitt, 2005). Although relevant literature exists on species-specific emotions regarding nature conservation (Castillo-Huitrón et al., 2020), I will focus on more general, less species- and context-specific emotions present in nature conservation. Importantly, I would like to emphasise that my use of the term ‘emotions’ is not contrasted with terms such as rationality, objectivity or facts, as a way to delegitimize emotions (González-Hidalgo & Zografos, 2020). Instead, I will use the term ‘emotion’ as one element in human relationships with their environment (Halla & Laine, 2022; Buijs & Lawrence, 2013), just like rationality is an element in this relationship. I will go further into the dichotomy and dualism between emotionality and rationality in the following section, discussing it from a feminist political ecology perspective.

2.4.1 Dualism between emotions and rationality

Three ways of relating emotion and rationality have been described by Barbalet (2001): the conventional view, critical approach and radical approach. According to the conventional view, emotions and rationality are opposed. The critical approach states that emotion gives direction to reason by identifying desires, purposes and goals. The radical approach argues that emotion and rationality are found on a continuum where emotion is not just supportive to ratio (as in line with the critical approach), but rationality itself is also a feeling (Barbalet, 2001; Milton, 2003). In this thesis, I move away from the conventional view, which is often found in (Western) science. Instead, I draw from both the critical and radical approach where emotions enable the development of knowledge and question the strict distinction between emotion and rationality. This allows me to treat emotions and rationality as elements of the same 'level' within discourses.

It is with this critical and radical view that I also question the way discourses relate emotions and rationality. The public discourse of nature conservation is dominated by rational language where 'valid' decisions are made based on rational instead of emotional arguments (Van den Born et al., 2018; Buijs & Lawrence, 2013). Emotional arguments and discourses are often de-legitimized or framed as ill-informed (Von Essen, 2017; Buijs & Lawrence, 2013). I argue that this dichotomy between emotion and (rational) information does not remain merely a dichotomy, but functions as dualism within the discourses of nature conservation. The definition of dualism I use here comes from Plumwood (2002, pp 47-48, italics added by me): 'Dualism is a relation of *separation and domination* inscribed and naturalised in culture and characterised by *radical exclusion, distancing and opposition* between orders constructed as systematically higher and lower, as *inferior and superior*, as ruler and ruled, which treats the division as part of the natures of beings construed not merely as different but as *belonging to radically different orders or kinds*, and hence as not open to change.' Within discourses of nature conservation, emotionality would function as the inferior and rationality as the superior order. This distinction has already been discussed in feminist political ecology as a patriarchal view that does not acknowledge the importance of emotions in ontologies and the complex and diverse relationships in environmental sociology (Banham, 2020). For this discourse analysis, the lens of feminist political ecology and dualism can help to understand hidden values behind the roles of rationality and emotions in different discourses, and the struggles between different discourses and their rationalities and emotions. These struggles in turn can affect and reflect the ontological (in)security of the groups behind different discourses.

2.5 Conceptual framework

From the aforementioned theoretical concepts, a conceptual framework has been distilled which relates the different concepts to each other in such a way that the research questions can be answered. This conceptual framework has been visualised (and simplified) in figure 1. The context into which these theoretical concepts are placed is the Anthropocene. This context includes the separation of humanity from nature (which informs the Paradox of the Anthropocene), and the increasingly unstable claims to truth (Browning & Joenniemi, 2017; Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). The existential questions related to the nature of existence, finitude and human life, the experience of others, and the continuity of self-identity (Shani, 2017; Giddens, 1991) which arise from the context of the Anthropocene, inform a sense of ontological (in)security of the subject. Here, climate change and the biodiversity crisis are used to illustrate the threats of the Anthropocene to ontological security in relation to the nonhuman natural world. These threats are shaped by three types of anxiety: engulfment, implosion and petrification (Shani, 2017; Laing, 1994). Ontological security can then be understood as the ability of the subject to deal with these anxieties affecting self-constitution (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020) within the context of the threats of the Anthropocene. Political

Discourse Theory allows me to understand why a certain discourse grips the subject, through the lens of (political) fantasies. Here, power is an essential (productive) force that creates discourses, including their power-rationality configurations (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011; Foucault, 1980; Jensen, 1997). Through fantasies, the subject can try to gain a sense of ontological security, where I assume that the subject has the agency to resist a position of ontological insecurity and shape their discursive response to this position. Within fantasies, the desire for a certain unattainable object creates a (fantasmatic) loop that shows the interdependence between ontological security, fantasy and emotions (Eberle, 2017).

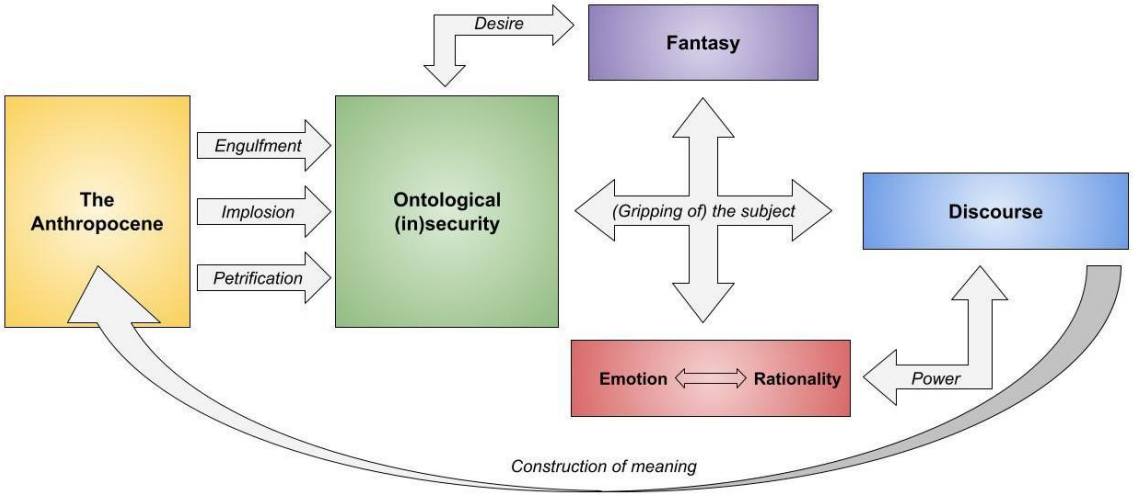

Figure 1. Simplified conceptual framework, which shows the interaction between the different theoretical concepts. This visualisation is an incomplete representation of the theory described in the theoretical framework, but is intended to offer some structure to the use of concepts and theories in this research.

3. Research methodology

In this chapter, the general approach of this research will be explained and put into the context of relevant literature. Afterwards, the data generation and data analysis will be described in depth. Lastly, the research process and ethical considerations will be discussed.

3.1 General approach

In order to answer the research questions, a qualitative exploration of societal expressions about the climate and biodiversity crises has been conducted by analysing newspaper articles, focus groups and interviews. The dataset consisted of a snapshot of views on the climate and biodiversity crises in Dutch society between March 2023 and March 2024, which was analysed for different articulations of threats to ontological security. The combination of data generation through newspaper article analysis, focus groups and interviews have allowed for methodological triangulation. In addition, this combination allowed me to use both natural (newspaper articles) and contrived (focus groups & interviews) data (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The discourse analysis that followed this data generation was roughly based on Hajer's (2006) steps for discourse analysis, and resulted in an iterative and abductive approach.

First, data was generated on the discursive responses to ontological insecurity in the Netherlands regarding nature conservation. This was done by identifying relevant topics that illustrate the threats of the Anthropocene to ontological security through desk research. These topics were then used to select newspaper articles. Afterwards, focus groups were held among policy makers, NGO employees, scientists and students. Using an initial analysis of the newspaper articles and focus groups, draft storylines were translated into statements and questions for the semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted with one member of each of the focus groups, as well as two additional scientists (to compensate for the lower number of participants in the scientist focus group). Together, the newspapers, focus groups and interviews were then analysed and used for (re-)constructing the storylines and discourses. All documents, focus groups and interviews, except for the focus group with NGOs, were originally in Dutch. Quotes used in the storylines were translated from Dutch to English. The climate and biodiversity crisis were used as illustrations of the threats to ontological security triggered by the Anthropocene in the focus groups and interviews.

The discourse analysis was based on a predetermined reading plan which used several sensitising concepts and heuristic devices to answer the research questions. This analysis has led to storylines which represent discursive responses to ontological insecurity and have been grouped into discourses. This way, the mechanisms behind different discursive responses could be examined and the main research question could be answered. These discursive responses have also been depicted by a piano piece to explore the roles of emotions and rationality in a less cognitive way. Each of the different steps of the data generation, as well as the data analysis, research process, and ethical considerations will now be discussed more in depth.

3.2 Data generation

3.2.1 Newspaper articles

The first part of the data generation consisted of collecting a total of 29 articles about the 2023 IPCC report and KNMI'23-climatescenarios, across three different newspapers. The aim was to get a first insight into different articulations of the threats to ontological security (illustrated by the IPCC and KNMI reports on the climate crisis) and the discursive responses to this insecurity across the political spectrum of Dutch society. In other words, analysing newspaper articles allowed me to see how meaning was constructed regarding the climate and biodiversity crises, and explore possible struggles between different representations of these crises.

Newspaper articles are suitable for this analysis, as these written/printed texts are one of the modes of the manifestation and use of a discourse (Van Dijk, 1983). These are naturally occurring materials, which has the advantage that I do not influence the material as I do with contrived material (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). News is a specific (re)construction of reality influenced by the norms and values of a particular group or society (Van Dijk, 1983). Newspaper articles can thus be seen as the manifestation of a complex process in which incoming information, knowledge, beliefs, the social context and representations of the reading public inform each other (Van Dijk, 1983). The data that can be generated from a newspaper article consists of a story that results from this interaction, which makes newspaper articles suitable manifestations of discourse for narrative analysis (Franzosi, 1998).

In order to limit the search for documents to analyse, the 2023 IPCC report (Lee et al., 2023) and KNMI'23-climatescenarios (KNMI, 2023) have been chosen as topics to illustrate the threats of the Anthropocene to ontological security regarding nature conservation in the Netherlands. The reports published by the IPCC are meant to be used by governments as the scientific basis to develop climate policies, as well as provide input for international climate change negotiations (*About — IPCC,* n.d.). In the Netherlands, the 2023 IPCC report has been discussed in the House of Representatives on multiple occasions. The IPCC reports are relevant in both a national and international political context, whilst also connecting the two. To further situate the IPCC report within the context of nature conservation in the Netherlands, I have also used the KNMI'23-climatescenarios as a topic of newspaper articles.

The IPCC and KNMI reports extensively discuss and emphasise the way humans threaten non-human nature, the current and future loss of nature (and its species, land- and seascapes) and the negative consequences this has for humanity. This includes threats to the characteristics of nature that inform ontological security, as described by Banham (2020). For example, both reports show how climate change will disturb the material constancy of nature through an increase in forest fires and loss of landscapes. Also, the reports both directly relate climate change and its environmental effects to human safety by emphasising the need to mitigate climate change to ensure the safety of people (KNMI, 2023; Lee et al., 2023). This reflects the characteristic of nature being symbolic of (and directly tied to) the future and human vulnerability, which also informs ontological (in)security (Banham, 2020). In addition, their (inter)national political and societal relevance has led to extensive newspaper coverage on the topics. I argue that this makes these reports reflective of the threats of the Anthropocene to ontological security regarding nature conservation, and suitable as the topics for the newspaper articles used in my discourse analysis.

NexisUni was used as the database for newspaper articles. The Dutch newspapers that were used for the selection of articles are: Trouw, NRC, and de Telegraaf. Trouw is a broadsheet newspaper with a protestant-Christian tradition and a predominantly centre, or centre-left leaning audience concerned with sustainability, democracy, religion and philosophy. NRC is another broadsheet newspaper, with a centrist, progressive liberal audience. De Telegraaf is a tabloid newspaper and popular in character, targeted towards a right-leaning audience (Broersma & Graham, 2012; Congleton et al., 2022; Brands, Graham & Broersma, 2018). These papers have been chosen as they are spread across the political spectrum, especially when it comes to sustainability, and have a high circulation of paid newspapers in the Netherlands (Brands, Graham & Boersma, 2018). This makes them relatively reflective of Dutch society and the diversity of discursive responses present within the Netherlands, considering the scope of my research. To narrow down the amount of articles to analyse, the articles that will be analysed are written within one week after the publish dates of the report (20-27 March, and 9-16 October, 2023), are from Trouw, NRC, or De Telegraaf, and contain the term IPCC and/or KNMI. An overview of these articles is presented in figure 2.

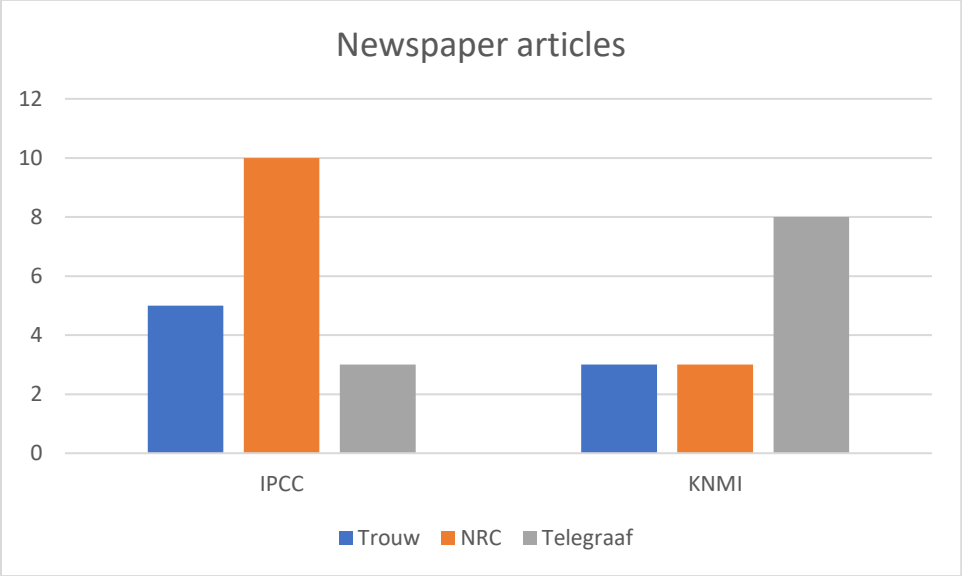

Figure 2. Overview of the newspaper articles used for the analysis. The articles about the IPCC report consisted of 5 Trouw articles, 10 NRC articles, and 3 Telegraaf articles. The articles about the KNMI report consisted of 3 Trouw articles, 3 NRC articles, and 8 Telegraaf articles.

3.2.2 Focus groups

To determine what discursive responses to threats to ontological security are present in certain social groups in the Netherlands, focus groups have been held. These focus groups were part of a research project of Wageningen University led by Jelle Behagel on the ideas, ideals and fantasies prevalent in society regarding nature and biodiversity. The focus groups are based on a combination of focus group methodology and group dialogues in psychoanalysis. The aim of the focus group was to uncover social and cultural assumptions on the role of nature in society, the understanding of threats to nature and how this relates to emotions and ontological insecurity. Here, interaction between participants facilitated in a focus group is essential for the uncovering of social and cultural assumptions. The assumption that lies underneath this is that language is the transindividual foundation of the relationship between the social structure and the individual consciousness (Nitzgen, 2013), and that language gives us the most direct access to unconscious fantasies and collective motives (de Mare et al., 1991; Nitzgen, 2013).

In order to achieve this aim, a median group is needed as this will prevent the participants from taking on familio-centric roles and will allow me to look at social and cultural pressures

(Nitzgen, 2013; de Maré et al., 1991). Therefore, focus groups were held with a size of four to eight participants. In total, four focus groups have been held: one among policy makers (7 participants), NGO employees (8 participants), students (7 participants) and scientists (4 participants). Table 1 shows an overview of these focus groups and their reference codes. Purposive sampling was used to gather participants with a homogeneous social and cultural background but with heterogeneity in personal views and attitudes, to allow for comfortable but diverse conversation between the participants. All participants were working/studying in the field of nature conservation, research (both from social and natural sciences) or policy in some way. The focus groups have been held in a circular seating style to ensure equal access to each other and encourage interactive dynamics in the group (Liamputtong, 2011). Each focus group took around 1.5 hours, this allowed for in-depth conversation and saturation on the topic. During the focus group, the moderator introduced prompts and asked questions to stimulate discussion, and two observers were present to take notes of both verbal and non-verbal communication. These notes were taken on a structured note-taking form (Appendix II) which focused on key points, notable quotes and non-verbal observations.

Table 1. Overview of the conducted focus groups, along with date, location and reference code.

Focus group	**Date & location**	**Reference code**
Policy makers	23-11-2023, The Hague	FG1-PM
NGO's	01-12-2023, Amsterdam	FG2-NGO
Students	15-12-2023, Wageningen	FG3-ST
Scientists	15-12-2023, Wageningen	FG4-SC

At the start of the focus groups, the participants were asked to describe their relationship to nature and show a picture that depicted this relationship (they were informed about this beforehand). This was done to gain familiarity with each other, and allow each participant time to speak. Afterwards, the moderator introduced five different prompts on the role of nature in society and ideals of nature. These prompts were introduced by a few pictures related to the topic of the prompt. The prompts that were used in the research project were:

1. What nature deserves/requires to be protected?
2. What is nature restoration? What is possible in nature restoration?
3. What is the future of nature in our world?
4. What is the role of knowledge in nature conservation?
5. What power matters for nature conservation?

Respectively, these prompts were used to generate responses on nature as an object of desire, human control as an object of desire, fantasmatic qualities of nature, the desire for knowledge, and instinctive desires. As mentioned previously, the focus groups were part of a research project by Jelle Behagel (the supervisor of this thesis), which had a shared goal with my thesis to uncover societal ideals and fantasies about biodiversity and the relationship between humans and nonhuman nature. These prompts were created in collaboration with Jelle Behagel. In the first focus group (with policy makers), only the first three prompts were presented due to a lack of time, but the discussion still allowed for a saturated analysis including the desire for knowledge and instinctive desires as these topics came up naturally.

The audio of the focus groups was recorded (with informed consent of the participants) and afterwards transcribed using a combination of Otter.AI, Word and manual transcription. A verbatim transcription style was chosen as it was thought to best depict the mood and emotions of the participants during the focus group.

3.2.3 Interviews

The last way data was generated was through six semi-structured interviews of 30 to 45 minutes. Interviews can be seen as a specific discursive space, of which the questions and the participation of the researcher are also a crucial part. The interview itself is thus part of an interactive meaning-making occasion (Nikander, 2012). A semi-structured interview allows for both a guidance of the topics discussed in order to retrieve relevant information for the research questions, as well as going in depth and producing longer accounts to analyse the discursive patterns created by the participant when they use specific discursive resources in their argumentation (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The ability to improvise follow-up questions based on the responses of the interviewee and to allow space for the interviewee's verbal expressions is an advantage of semi-structured interviews (Kallio et al., 2016). The way data was generated through interviews in this research increased the credibility and dependability of this research. Credibility, which refers to the quality and trustworthiness of the recording of phenomena under scrutiny, was gained through the identification of the use of previous knowledge in creating the interview questions and determining the appropriateness of the interviews as a research method (Kallion et al., 2016). Dependability, which refers to the repeatability of this research, was gained by creating a transparent interview guide (see Annex III) which allows for the availability of the data collection tool for future research. Together, these aspects enhance the trustworthiness of this research and its data generation.

One member of each focus group was selected and interviewed (see table 2 for the interviews and reference codes). The participants that were selected were not the most dominant members of the focus groups, but made comments that either needed more clarification or seemed representative of their focus group. In addition, two scientists that did not participate in the focus groups were also interviewed, which was done to compensate for the lower number of participants in the focus group due to last-minute cancellations. This way, the interviews served as an additional source of information on the discursive responses to ontological insecurity triggered by the Anthropocene, as well as a member check to increase the validity of the research and complete the methodological triangulation.

Table 2. Overview of interviews and their date, location and reference code.

Interview	**Date & location**	**Reference code**
Scientist 1	09-02-2024, Wageningen	I1-SC
Scientist 2	13-02-2024, Wageningen	I2-SC
Scientist 3	15-02-2024, Wageningen	I3-SC
NGO employee	16-02-2024, online	I4-NGO
Student	21-02-2024, Wageningen	I5-ST
Policy maker	22-02-2024, online	I6-PM

From the initial analysis of the newspapers and focus groups six different storylines were distilled which represented different discursive responses to ontological insecurity. These storylines were presented as statements to the interviewees, after which the participants were asked if they recognised the storyline and to explain whether or not they agreed with the statement. Afterwards, some additional clarifying questions were asked on the way they perceive their ontological (in)security as a response to the climate and biodiversity crisis as well as the role of emotions and rationality in their response (see Annex III for the complete

interview guide). The interviews were recorded with informed consent, and transcribed using Word and manual transcription in a verbatim transcription style.

3.3 Data analysis

Different discursive responses were delineated from the newspaper articles, focus groups and interviews by focusing on four different aspects. First, the *aspects of the world* to which meaning is given by the discursive response. Second, the *way* in which the response gives meaning. Third, the aspects where an open *struggle between different representations* of the world are found. Last, *the understandings that are naturalised* within all of the responses and are understood as common-sense (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). These aspects, along with the sub-research questions, several sensitising concepts and heuristic devices, were incorporated into a step-by-step analysis plan, which has been visualised in table 3.

Table 3. Step-by-step analysis plan

Analysis step	**Purpose + actions**	**Heuristic devices & sensitising concepts**
1. General reading	Get a first impression of the data and highlight relevant or remarkable quotes.	n.a.
2. Re-read	Gain familiarity with the data and start noting down striking or relevant quotes.	n.a.
3. Look for ontological (in)security (quotes)	Determine how ontological (in)security and the threats of the Anthropocene are articulated (sub-question 1)	Banham (2020) framework of ontological security, adapted to nature conservation.
4. Determine floating signifiers, empty signifiers and nodal points	Gain insight into the following questions: • Do different discursive responses to ontological insecurity define these nodal points in different ways? • Do they become floating signifiers? • Which understanding is taken for granted across different discourses?	Floating signifier, empty signifier, nodal point
5. Determine narratives & fantasies	Explore the fantasmatic qualities of discursive responses to ontological security	Narrative, fantasy, Obstacle/threatening Other, antagonism, agonism
6. Determine the role of emotions and rationality	Explore how emotions and rationality are used in gaining ontological security and responding to insecurity (sub-question 3)	Emotions, rationality
7. Make storylines based on chains of signification	Determine different discursive responses by making storylines based on the articulation of the threat, what is perceived as threatened, and the proposed solution, using the previous steps (sub-question 2)	Combination of previously used devices

After a general reading and re-reading of the texts (step 1 and 2), familiarity was gained with the content of the texts and first impressions of possible storylines were noted down. In step 3, quotes that resembled the characteristics signifying ontological (in)security were deductively coded and used for the analysis of the articulation of the threat of the Anthropocene to ontological security. In addition, quotes or observations that were inductively analysed as representative of ontological (in)security were also coded. In step 4 and 5, floating signifiers, empty signifiers, nodal points, narratives and fantasies were used as elements of the discursive responses. The co-occurrence of nodal points served as the initial structure of storylines. In step 5, fantasies were recognised within discursive responses through the desire and emotion they are powered by, the presence of mechanisms of projection and splitting (which can be expressed through strong antagonisms), and their 'black and white' character (Behagel & Mert, 2021; Eberle, 2017). Here, I did not determine whether a discursive response contained fantasies or not, but I explored whether I found them to be higher or lower in fantasmatic qualities. Looking at narratives and fantasies allowed me to understand what 'mechanisms' are employed in the discursive responses that take place. In step 6, attention was paid to the way emotions and rationality were used in the enunciative functions of statements.

Based on the findings in step 1 to 6, storylines were set up in step 7 that represent different discursive responses to the climate and biodiversity crisis. This was done by looking at repetitive patterns of signifiers in chains of signification (Lapping & Glynos, 2018), and organising and (re-)constructing them into storylines following the structure of a narrative. After the storylines had been constructed and described, they were compared to each other to see whether there are struggles between different representations of the world and whether certain things are naturalised (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). This led to the grouping of storylines into different discourses. Constructing and comparing the different storylines allowed me to gain insight into *how* we see different responses to the ontological insecurity triggered by the Anthropocene in discourses regarding nature conservation in the Netherlands, and answer the main research question.

Although table 3 shows the analysis as a linear process, in practice it was an iterative process with a going back and forth between steps. The steps, which were determined before the analysis took place, were thus not set in stone, but meant to offer structure and transparency to the analysis. The different steps and their respective quotes were coded using a combination of Atlas.ti and manual coding.

3.3.1 Musical analysis

As a methodological experiment to account for the emotive aspects of responses to ontological insecurity, a musical depiction of each storyline has been made. The reasoning behind this is that a (discursive) response to ontological insecurity is not merely linguistic, but also contains emotive responses. These emotions are harder to convey in a textual analysis, as this will result in a more cognitive experience of the discourse from both the researcher and the reader's point of view. Piano music has therefore been chosen as the medium to make space for a more emotional experience and with that balancing the rational and emotive aspects of the analysis in a way that was within the capabilities of the researcher.

The depictions of the storylines were made in three phases: improvisation during the data collection, distillation during the analysis, and structuring after the storylines were written out and analysed. First, improvisation during the data collection consisted of intuitively writing music for key themes that stood out during the data collection. Second, these improvisations were distilled during the analysis, based on whether they still felt fitting to the emotions and structure of the discursive responses. After the storylines were analysed and written out, key emotive themes were written down and translated into musical elements. This resulted in a 'mood board' from which musical themes were combined into a short composition. Making

music (or any artform) in order to convey emotions is a personal and subjective creative process which is hard to directly reproduce. However, there were some questions that (consciously or unconsciously) guided the musical analysis and resulted in musical choices (such as the key, structure, or style of the music). I have presented these guiding questions in table 4 as a way to make the analysis more transparent.

Table 4. Guiding questions and musical translations for the musical depiction of discursive responses.

Guiding Question	**Answer and translation**	
Does the storyline feel *heavy or light*?	**Heavy:** Dense chords, minor key	**Light:** Arpeggios, major key
Does the storyline have a *black/white or nuanced* character?	**Black/white:** Strong contrasts (pace, tone, minor and major scales)	**Nuanced:** Melodic space and slower paced
Is the storyline more *emotional or rational*?	**Emotional:** Key changes, melodic	**Rational:** Harmonic, pedal notes and repetitive chord progression
Does the storyline feel *ontologically secure or insecure*?	**Secure:** Predictable melody and structure	**Insecure:** Dissonant tones
Is there *acceptance of insecurity*?	**Yes:** Non Ionian scale (e.g. mixolydian)	**No:** One key or drastic key changes
Does the storyline emphasise *urgency*?	**Yes:** Higher tempo, emphasised notes	**No:** Laid-back tempo, more jazzy melodies

3.4 Research process & reflective journal

During the research process, a reflective journal was kept to keep track of the research process, experienced hurdles, hunches during the data generation and reflect on my role in this research. This reflective journal informed the results and added to the iterative process of the research. No big hurdles or significant obstacles were experienced during the research.

3.5 Ethical considerations & validation

3.5.1 Informed consent

Before participants took part in the focus groups and interviews, they were sent a consent form which included a brief explanation of my research, the setup of the focus group or interview, and how their data would be treated. Each participant was asked to give consent for the use of their data and was given the possibility to ask questions or withdraw from the research at any time. At the start of each focus group and interview, the participants were asked again if they consented with the recording of their data. During the transcription of the focus groups and interviews, the data was immediately anonymised and personal information of the participant was left out of quotes or anonymised in the research results.

3.5.2 Transparency, trust & member check

In order to increase the validity of the research, the methods used and the data analysis have been described in an elaborate and transparent manner. During the interpretation of the data, I have aimed not to uncover a hidden meaning behind the participant's quotes, but instead let the quotations speak for themselves, following a combination of Lacan's and Foulkes approaches to focus groups (Nitzgen, 2013). By not claiming to know the intentions or desires of the participants better than they expressed themselves, I aim to show trust in the participants. This was also done by returning to the participants with my primary analysis during the interviews. By doing a member check, I tried to involve the participants in the analysis process and be transparent about my own analysis. However, interpretation and subjectivity is inevitable in discourse analysis, so I will emphasise once again that I do not aim to discover the truth, but merely explore the research questions openly.

3.5.3 Positionality

As a researcher, I am an instrument of this research and part of the results as well. It is therefore important to acknowledge my role as the analyst in the analysis of discourses. According to Foucault, it is impossible to gain access to some universal truth as we are not capable of taking a position outside of discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011). I will elaborate on my own positionality here to create transparency and acknowledge the way it has inevitably affected my interpretations.

I will take from the critical discourse perspective that the analyst is no bystander, and recognise my own political engagement with the topic of this thesis (Wetherell, 2001). As mentioned before, I am critical of the dualism between emotionality and rationality. However, I am educated in predominantly positivist, ecological, Western science, which often includes this dualism. This may have affected my research, as it is difficult to treat those discourses that are close to me as socially constructed meaning-systems instead of 'the truth'. I may therefore have taken for granted certain expressions within my own discourse as common-sense, whilst someone from a different background would not (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011). To enhance the trustworthiness of this research, I have been transparent about and reflexive of my decisions and interpretations, so that the reader can make their own interpretations as well (Schwartz-Shea, 2015).

4. Results

The results of the analysis of the document analysis, focus groups and interviews will be presented as storylines. Five different storylines have been found. For each of the storylines, the different proxies for ontological security as explained in the methods and conceptual framework will be discussed in four sections. First, the perceived threat to ontological security, the aspects of ontological security that are seen as threatened, and the solution to this threat will be explored. This will result in an overview of the storyline. Second, the fantasmatic qualities of the storyline will be discussed, including the object of desire. Third, the role of nature in ontological security will be discussed using the framework of Banham (2020). Lastly, I will elaborate on the role of emotions and rationality in the different storylines. In the discussion these storylines will be grouped into discourses and general remarks about the role of emotions in these discursive responses as well as the use of (empty or floating) signifiers will be explored in more depth. Next to this textual analysis, a QR-code which links to an audio file of the musical analysis is given. The audio file can be opened by either scanning the QR-code or clicking on the QR-code and opening the hyperlink. This audio file can be listened to before, during or after the reading of the text. Some guiding questions that could enrich the understanding of the analysis are: what kind of feeling does this music trigger for you? Does this match the textual description of the storyline? (Why/why not?) How do the different musical depictions compare? The music and guiding questions are meant to invite some reflection on the emotional and rational aspects of the storyline by mobilising other senses and allowing for a more emotive experience of the storyline.

4.1 There is hope: technology is our saviour, alarmism is our enemy

This narrative is predominantly found in the Telegraaf newspaper, but also mentioned in several focus groups and recognised in all interviews. Starting with its articulation of the threats of the Anthropocene to ontological security, this narrative emphasises that climate change is not a threat to panic about. Instead, it mentions other threats that should be seen as higher priorities to tackle:

> '*Let's first make sure that there are no wars anymore. If we talk about pollution, what is happening now in Ukraine is something we won't be able to catch up on in 10 years. Meanwhile we are worrying about 1.5 degrees*.'
> (Zimmerman, 2023)

This response to a previous article of the Telegraaf about the IPCC report shows how climate change is not necessarily seen as the most important threat, by comparing it to another crisis, the war in Ukraine. The war in Ukraine is seen as a higher priority than staying below 1.5 degrees warming. Here, the concept of 1.5 degrees is used as a signifier to downplay the urgency of tackling climate change. In addition, climate change is seen as a natural phenomenon:

> *'"Climate change is something of all times", many respondents say. "This process goes on for centuries and is unstoppable. Nature will take her course and adapt to the circumstances".* (Zimmerman, 2023)

By depicting climate change as a natural phenomenon, climate change does not seem to disturb a certain order, and is thus not framed as a great threat. Instead, climate change is framed as something inevitable which nature is capable of adapting to. This way, humans are placed outside of both the responsibility and the solution of climate change.

When climate change is perceived as a threat, it refers mostly to the loss of characteristics of national identity which are tied to nature:

> *'The thought that we, residents of this drained polder, can never again look forward to such a crisply cold, clear winter day on which we put on our trousers, tie up the Frisian footpaths and travel two hundred kilometres to our Zeelandish girl with a clay pipe in our mouth. skating on nothing but a lard sandwich is intolerable. In return, we get wet winters, dry summers and more downpours, unless the calculation revealed only for 'professional users' predicts otherwise. Can that report also be made public? After all, the future of the climate belongs to all of us.*' (Peereboom Voller, 2023)

Water and the battle against water are seen as important aspects of Dutch identity. This stems from important historical events such as the North Sea flood of 1953, and technological solutions to control the danger of water such as the Deltaworks and the reclamation of the Zuiderzee. Human control over water, along with Dutch traditions are framed here with a sense of pride, and the loss of such traditions is seen as a threat to this national identity. However, the legitimacy of climate change as a threat to national identity, and ontological security in general is questioned in this narrative:

> '*Roger Pielke jr., an American expert on climate models and extreme weather events, accuses the KNMI of 'scientific malpractices'. "SSP5-8.5 is unlikely future scenario", he says on X.*' (Jager, 2023)

The legitimacy of the science behind those climate scenarios that threaten ontological security is decreased, and with that the threat to ontological security is disavowed. In addition, by framing the climate crisis as a discussion held among scientists, which are at a distance from the public, this narrative also puts the threat of climate change at a distance. In other words, framing climate change as a (scientific) elitist topic, belonging to 'professional users', this narrative decreases the threat by not making it a part of daily life. On top of that, reclaiming the discussion around climate change by stating that 'the future of the climate belongs to all of us', it increases a sense of security: the control around the discussion does not lie with elitist scientists anymore, it lies with us. The disavowal of climate change as a threat is also enhanced by focusing on the potential of technological solutions:

> '*In almost all of these scenarios, the world will temporarily exceed 1.5 degrees of warming. "But there are also ways back," says Detlef van Vuuren, researcher at the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency and professor of climate science in Utrecht. He is 'hopeful' about renewable, cleaner energy, which can replace fossil fuels, gas, coal and oil. According to the scientist, for example, it is "quite possible" that everyone will be able to drive electrically within ten to fifteen years*' (Besteman, 2023)

Ontological *in*security is thus not very visible in this narrative. This is partly due to the way nature is valued as an object of desire based on control. Nature is valued by its consistency, trustworthiness and adaptability in times of climate crises, which informs ontological security. Control over nature works two ways in this narrative. On the one hand, distance is created between human control and nature by stating that nature will 'take her course and adapt' (Zimmerman, 2023). On the other hand, the future of nature and climate change *is* controllable through technological solutions. Nature which is adaptive *and* controllable is thus the object of desire in this narrative. The duality in the way nature is seen as an object of

desire makes it possible to feel ontologically secure in a context where nature is seen as controllable, and as adaptive.

The idea that ‘nature will take her course and adapt’ (Zimmerman, 2023) to climate change, seems to depict nature as a constant factor, which is similar to the way Banham (2020) described that nature can offer ontological security through its material constancy. However, the possible loss of traditions that symbolise control over nature could threaten ontological security. When worry is expressed about ontological insecurity, it is done by referring to a loss of national identity by losing national traditions. These traditions are, and the Dutch relation with nature is, often related to control *over* nature (think of the Dutch ‘battle against water’). Here, another comparison to the adapted framework of Banham (2020) can be drawn, as the loss of national traditions can be seen as a threat to nature as symbolic of a consistent self-narrative. More specifically, the national identity, or national consistent self-narrative which perceives humans as being able to conquer or control nature seems to be threatened. From this constructed relationship with nature which consists of both a lack of control (material constancy) and having control (national consistent self-narrative), ontological security arises and ontological insecurity is disavowed, but the possible loss of traditions that symbolise this control can threaten ontological security.

This storyline uses technological rationality and expertise to inform hopeful emotions as a response to the threats caused by exceeding 1.5 degrees of warming. By stating that ‘there are also ways back’ and showing a perspective in which technological solutions will soon be viable, the threat to ontological security is further denied. In contrast to the hope that is created by technological solutions, emotions such as panic and grief are seen as ineffective responses:

> *"We must stop hyping this subject so extremely here in the Netherlands and treating it in a panicky manner," responds another. "With all that panicky stuff you lose all support among the population and you achieve the opposite of what you want. Working on this step by step with smart innovations and involving the population may take a little longer, but ultimately it will yield much greater results and satisfaction."* (Zimmerman, 2023)

Throughout this technocratic narrative, alarmism and those who ‘panic’ or show strong emotions about the threat of climate change and the biodiversity crisis are seen as ineffective and irrational responses. The emphasis on rational, technological solutions and the delegitimization of emotional responses to threats to ontological security show the disavowing nature of this narrative.

4.2 Climate change and the biodiversity crisis are inherently human issues

This narrative was found predominantly amongst scientists and in articles of the Trouw and NRC newspapers. It has a strong anthropocentric focus in its articulation of the threat to ontological security, what is perceived as threatened, and the proposed solution. This narrative argues that:

> *‘Humanity is the cause, victim and solution of climate change’* (Van de Wiel, 2023).

This does not mean that the threats to non-human nature are excluded in this storyline, but it frames the climate and biodiversity crisis as inherently human issues because of the human valuing of the crises.

Humanity is seen as the cause of climate change and the biodiversity crisis. Specifically, human actions and the current societal model which focuses on (economic) growth is seen as the cause of climate change, and a threat to ontological security. This is also tied to the idea that the current size and growth of the human population, in combination with the way the majority of the human population is living, is unsustainable. Within this narrative, this view on humanity is nuanced by recognising inequality between those who live most unsustainably and profit from nature, and those who are the victims of climate change and the biodiversity crisis.

When the threat to humanity is discussed, this narrative focuses on the quality of life that is threatened. Although the survival of humanity is also perceived as threatened, greater emphasis is placed on a decrease in quality of life:

> *'It is more of a natural environment that is very important for mental health, at least that is how I strongly experience it, right? If it all gets flattened and species disappear all the time and it becomes an incredibly boring survivalist landscape. That makes me feel really horrible.'* (I3-SC)

This loss of nature as supportive to mental health and quality of life is already experienced and placed in the context of one's own lifetime:

> *'But what really touches me is the idea of yes, that quality of life too, but the natural environment, if I can't walk in the woods or just be outside for a while, then, then I become deeply unhappy. That's very personal, right? But when I walk through, I remember walking through the fields as a child, a long time ago, through the agricultural area and there was an abundance of life. And now when I walk through agricultural areas, there is dead silence.'* (I3-SC)

A strong focus also lies on the loss of species in the articulation of the threat of the Anthropocene to ontological security, and less attention is paid to exceeding 1.5 degrees of warming. It is seen as a diplomatic instrument to ensure political action, and not necessarily as the symbol for (human) survival, as it is used in other narratives:

> *'1.5 or 1.6, that will still be fine, but I understand the message that, yes, you just have to, you want to use a fixed point to, say, reinforce the call for action instead of, let's see how far we'll get'* (I2-SC)

In addition to being the cause and victim of climate change and the biodiversity crisis, humanity is also seen as the solution. This is not necessarily stated from a place of trust or faith in humanity, but from a more pragmatic argument:

> *'I do not see another form of life or something suddenly solving the climate problem'* (I2-SC)

However, it is questioned whether humanity is able to be both the cause and the solution:

> *'It is in fact a question for humanity to transcend itself. Can humanity put aside their differences, partial interests and short term profits for the benefit of the Earth in general, out of respect for descendants and all that lives and will live?'* (NRC, 2023)

In order to ensure a quality of life for all life on earth, humanity should 'transcend itself'. However, since humanity is also seen as the cause of the climate and biodiversity crisis, the belief that humanity has the ability to overcome their current short-term vision is not strong, although it is seen as necessary for humanity's own well-being:

> *'In the long term, I think there will come a moment when society really needs the value of nature in a broad sense for its well-being, and then, well, that will have to lead to it being protected. I think, the more you lose, the more acute it will become and the more you will encounter things like: shit, we needed this. And the faster you become aware of that and the earlier you preserve it, the more well-being you retain. But, that is not the case yet, since at least the individual decides from a short-term perspective about their own well-being. Yes, if you were to continue this line endlessly I think there would have to be a balance at some point, and if that would be with a lot less nature, then it would ultimately go hand in hand with less well-being, I think'* (FG4-SC)

Within this narrative, there seems to be the belief that a certain point needs to come where the conditions for human well-being are at such a catastrophic level, that humans have no other choice but to change their way of living and exploiting the Earth. There is little trust in humanity to change their ways without such a trigger:

> *'When I look at the development of political systems over the last centuries, I am not so incredibly hopeful about that, I am not, let me put it this way, I am not really optimistic when it comes to those kinds of things. I rather think that a major crisis is the only thing that can turn us around. A kind of, almost catastrophism, I would say. I'm not looking forward to it, but really changing things, making really fundamental choices in such a cumbersome body as humanity is, I don't think it's ever happened, except through major catastrophes.'* (I3-SC)

The way this narrative uses a socio-ecological (tipping) point where conditions are catastrophic illustrates the conflict between humanity being the cause, victim and solution to the climate and biodiversity crisis. Humanity itself, and the current political trend specifically, is seen as the Obstacle to obtaining the scenario where humanity has a relationship with nature that preserves the values of nature that ensure (human) well-being. The transformational change that should happen to reach this scenario, and which is believed to probably only occur when conditions are much worse, is a change in ideology. However, the finger is not pointed towards institutions such as capitalism as the root of the problem, instead the role of humanity itself is emphasised again:

> *'No, I mean, at the end of the day we do that [referring to capitalism] ourselves, right? So I mean, those may be ideologies, if that's even what they are, that have played a leading role in our behaviour, but you can reject the ideology, but that doesn't change people. But I do think that you can take a critical look at what your ideology is and why you still use it. Why do you even use it? And, I mean, it is very human that, big changes are rare I think, in ideology or ways of organising society'* (I2-SC)

In addition, the changes in humanity's way of life that are seen as needed in this storyline go beyond just a different economic model, as overpopulation is also seen as the cause for climate change and the biodiversity crisis:

> *'I mean, even if you can find a way to stop economic growth, which indeed often goes hand in hand with energy consumption, you still need to find ways to live with 8 billion people on this planet. Any way you look at it, that means there will be much less room*

for nature than there was, let's say, 200 years ago. I don't want to say that all of that is insurmountable, but yes, you will still need that space.' (I2-SC)

Overpopulation is mentioned again as the threat to nature and ontological security, but no clear arguments are made about how to deal with this. The problem seems to be only pointed out and is mentioned with caution, and the sensitivity of the topic is recognised. Again, the way humans are the cause, victim, and solution seems to create friction in this narrative, which might lead to ontological insecurity.

Although this narrative does not deny the responsibility it has to stop climate change and the biodiversity crisis for non-human nature, stating that climate change and the biodiversity crisis are inherently human issues and valued by humans does seem to make the consequences of human actions smaller. If humans are the only ones who experience these crises as issues, then they will also only prevail on a human time scale. The idea that nature will be able to bounce back offers some perspective, but this does not seem to weigh up against the loss of species and the possible extinction of humanity, since emphasis is placed on the human experience as it is the only experience people have:

'I think [the idea that nature will survive, and humanity might not] is a funny perspective. In the sense that sometimes people talk about that the planet will perish, no the planet will not perish. In the end, it is all about us. And so, in that sense I can understand it, but as a kind of consolation or something, like, well if we do not manage to do anything about it, then at least something will survive? No, I don't think so. Certainly not to the coming generations.' (I2-SC)

In this narrative, nature that symbolises life, which is often depicted as rich and abundant in species, is seen as the object of desire. Although the possible loss of this intrinsic value of species is responded to with sadness, it is also placed in an Anthropocentric context to show that this is seen as a human loss, and not a loss for nature or planet Earth in the grand scheme of things:

'Look, I think on a human timescale, it is extraordinarily sad that species are disappearing.' (I3-SC)

Within this storyline, the sadness of losing a desired value of nature is often put in perspective of a larger, natural time scale beyond our own experience. This could be a way to disavow the threat to ontological security. But at the same time, this does not seem to ensure ontological security entirely:

'Nature really will bounce back, that is totally… But that is a very large timescale. That will be of no use for us humans' (I3-SC)

Similarly to the previous narrative, nature is seen as adaptive and resilient. In other words, the material constancy of nature is recognised, but since species will still be lost within the 'human timescale', this quality of nature does not seem to offer ontological security like it did in the previous narrative. The loss and ontological insecurity which are experienced, are therefore framed around the human experience, which is both a way to put this loss into perspective as well as acknowledge the effect it has on humans. Also, the attachment of a (negative) value to the climate and biodiversity crisis, is seen as inevitably and inherently human:

'Well, and in the end it's of course a, I mean, it is human, I mean we think it is a problem, right? So in that sense… And, we find it and some of us also find it a

problem for others, organisms and all. But those organism don't think so themselves of course, I think.' (I2-SC)

In addition to nature as symbolic of life being the object of desire, knowledge about nature is also desired. The meaning attached to the relationship with nature experienced by people within this storyline is tied to both the intrinsic value and beauty of different species, and with that the knowledge about those species. Knowing nature is an essential part of experiencing nature:

'I think the very first thing is that I find nature, well mainly plants actually, but I find it beautiful on different scales. I mean I find landscapes beautiful, but just an individual plant or animal I also think are beautiful in some way. The same way you can find art beautiful, certain shapes, but there is also some curiosity, I find, I want to understand: but why do I find this, here, and why can I take this picture there in the dunes, but not here in Wageningen, and what is the reason behind that. So for me it is trying to understand what is out there.' (FG4-SC)

This urge to know also informs both ontological security and insecurity:

'I feel like that in terms of understanding the world, you actually live in a kind of permanent uncertainty, and that you, at least I try to understand everything, sometimes I have the feeling that, yes, I think I understand how things work better than I did 10 years ago, but at the same time you immediately run into other things, which makes you think, hmm, maybe I do not fully understand it after all' (I2-SC)

The relationship with nature where meaning is constructed around knowledge seems to increase a sense of ontological security. This also means that being confronted with a lack of understanding, or losing those valued and known species, leads to a sense of ontological insecurity. In short, nature which symbolises life through the intrinsic value of species richness and diversity, and nature which can be experienced and known by humans seem to be the objects of desire in this storyline.

The relationship with nature is a source of ontological security in different ways. First, the natural environment has a positive effect on mental health and well-being. Second, the natural environment informs happiness through containing an abundance of life. Together, these qualities of nature offer an environment in which people can recharge, rest and return to themselves. When these aspects are placed within the framework of Banham (2020), nature can be seen as symbolic of escape and refuge from the contemporary world. These qualities of nature that inform ontological security are repeatedly mentioned in association with species abundance and diversity in this narrative. Moreover, the loss of species due to the climate and biodiversity crisis is seen to directly threaten nature as a source of ontological security, as it creates an 'incredibly boring survivalist landscape' and 'dead silence'. It seems as if the species that can be found in nature symbolise life, and if those species are threatened, so is human life, which leads to ontological insecurity. This loss is further extrapolated by referring to the quality of life of future generations:

'There are a lot of us and I see things like that all the time. Then that triggers me, I think, oh, where should I go? And when I think about my own children, I think, they are of the age where they might start thinking about children of their own and I don't know whether that should make me happy at the moment! And I think that is the most intense. That really affects me. I think, huh, you should be happy about that at some point. My wife, for example, doesn't have that at all, she's just, she would love that. But I'm like, jeez' (I3-SC)

Overpopulation is also seen to affect future generations, and instead of the prospect of future generations triggering joy, it triggers a sense of doubt and concern. This is related to the view that biodiversity is declining, and that the well-being of nature as a symbol of life is decreasing. When we put the concern for future generations, in combination with nature as symbolic of life and well-being, into the context of the framework of Banham (2020), different aspects of the relation with nature that this narrative depicts seem to be interrelated in the way they inform ontological security. This narrative questions whether future generations can have a good quality of life when they cannot have the same relationship with nature, and experience the same species diversity and abundance, as people expressing these concerns have had. This could be interpreted as nature as symbolic of a generational consistent self-narrative being threatened, as important experiences with the natural world which inform the well-being of people now, are feared to disappear for future generations. In other words, when the future of nature becomes uncertain due to the climate and biodiversity crisis, so does the future of human well-being, in which a certain relation with nature and species plays a central role. The way a decrease in well-being of nature (due to the climate and biodiversity crisis) is parallel to the perceived decrease in well-being of people (related to the loss of nature as symbolic of escape and refuge, as well as the threat to a consistent generational narrative), could indicate that nature itself is seen as symbolic of the future and human vulnerability. These three different ways in which the symbolism and meaning constructed around the relationship with nature informs ontological security are hard to separate within this storyline, and seem to inform each other.

Although other narratives also mention knowledge about nature, this narrative seems to emphasise the importance of knowledge in the meaning attached to a relation with nature the most. The strong presence of the urge to know nature in this narrative leaves less space for emotions, as there is a focus on the role of knowledge in the perceived way to counteract the ontological insecurity that is triggered by the Anthropocene. This is not to say that the ontological insecurity itself is not experienced emotionally, as previous quotes have also shown. The frequent mention of emotions in relation to the articulation of the threat to ontological security is in contrast to the previous narrative, where emotionality is denied. However, in this narrative emotions are not seen as functional in mitigating the climate and biodiversity crisis:

> *'It doesn't help anyone if I am very emotional when educating, telling a story about the fact that all the skylarks have disappeared. I do mention it occasionally, but in the context of certain developments, but no one can do anything with those emotions of mine, while my arguments, those could be of use for someone'* (I3-SC)

This narrative thus not so much delegitimizes emotions (in the way the previous narrative delegitimized alarmism), but more so separates the roles of emotions and rationality when it comes to experiencing and mitigating the effects of climate change and the biodiversity crisis. Moreover, the constant use of time-scales and nuance in this narrative give it an abstract and emotionally distant character, even though emotions are used in its response to ontological insecurity. The emotional distance that seems to be created between the subjects and the threat to ontological insecurity might be due to the cognitive nature of putting things in perspective and creating nuance, whereas other narratives that seem more emotional are less nuanced and use emotions more directly.

4.3 Nature will survive, humanity might not

This storyline was found predominantly in the focus group among NGOs. As opposed to the previous narrative, this storyline seems to show a greater sense of acceptance of the ontological insecurity triggered by the climate and biodiversity crisis. This narrative gains acceptance and a sense of hope from the belief that nature will survive either way, even if humanity might not survive.

Capitalism, along with overconsumption and a lack of awareness of the natural world in (Western) society are framed as the biggest threats. Specifically, commodification and (over)consumption as central characteristics of capitalism are seen to threaten our quality of life:

> *'I also feel this way, that's one of the issues of capitalism, which tries to commodify everything, including all our time. So every moment of the time, we should be consuming something that's what the system wants us to do, because that's how it keeps on.. [...] and in a way we need to sort of break that system and maybe go back. And that's it's kind of sounds a little hippie, romantic in a way but in a simpler way of living without losing quality of life in that sense, you know, actually maybe increasing it'* (FG2-NGO)

Quality of life, as mentioned in this quote, is less central in the articulation of what is perceived as threatened in comparison to the previous narrative. Although the survival and quality of life of humanity is recognised to be threatened, there seems to be an acceptance of this threat. Instead of showing grief or sadness for this potentially fatal future, hope is gained from the idea that nature will survive regardless of whether humanity will solve the climate and biodiversity crises:

> *'If we look at the ecosystem of the world, nature is, right, it will always survive somehow, it can be destroyed, like something new will come out of it. Maybe humans won't be happy with that. Yeah, so nature somehow will, in the end always be there'* (FG2-NGO)

When a solution is discussed in order to preserve nature for human survival, it mirrors the articulation of the threat, as an alternative to capitalism and a greater awareness of the necessity of nature for human survival are seen to be able to increase the chances of survival for humanity. However, this is seen as a solution for the long term. On a shorter time scale, it is argued that capitalism can be used in favour of nature conservation:

> '*Because you get people that don't really care about nature, because they don't have the connection, what we talked about before, but they do care about their money. And if you give them a business model that works for their money, then they're fine. And then they're happy. Nobody's against preserving nature. It's just that it's not on their priority list.*' (FG2-NGO)

This does lead to some friction between the ideal scenario and pragmatic ways to get there:

> *'I think for me, it's this very, very pragmatic versus idealistic discussion for me, like, in pragmatic terms, I feel, you know, that you can probably do some stuff by proper regulation, and you can improve, you know, maybe you can actually get some*

funding for nature conservation and stuff like that. But on a more fundamental level, you know, by definition, of course, without putting any kind of moral label on it, but capitalism is by definition, an exploitative model system by definition, that's what it is. And so, and then the question is, can it in the long term, you know, be sustainable in a way so that's, that's always the conflict like okay, I will be pragmatic now because it seems like you know, when it comes to like, the meat and the soy, producing a feed industry, we need to do something because it's, you know, and so we operate within the in the system, but you know, long term' (FG2-NGO)

Although ontological security is gained from the idea that nature will prevail, nature as a symbol of identity and a place to rest are still perceived as threatened. In order to cover for this threat, this narrative argues that a solution to solve the biodiversity and climate crises should also be related to awareness of the dependence of humans on nature:

'So we're now saying, like, what is the future of nature? Yeah, but nature is sort of the term, I think what nature looks like determines our future, you know, sort of goes back to like restoring our relationship in a way with nature' (FG2-NGO)

However, the idea that reconnecting to nature will solve the climate and biodiversity crisis, is also questioned within the same narrative that argues in favour of it:

'Would that change their behaviour if this connection is back? Isn't that because that's kind of the assumption, right? And I'm not so sure if that's true.' (FG2-NGO)

Throughout the discussion of a solution to the global environmental crises, this narrative raises questions and offers different arguments, with what seems like little intention to be very definitive and urgent about these solutions. The interrelatedness of the well-being of humans and nature is also emphasised, and the friction that arises from nature being both the threat to nature, as well as the victim of the consequences is recognised:

'We as humans are harming nature, and thereby sort of separating us from nature as if there's nature and you have humans and they are separate entities, whereas we are part of it, without nature there, we cannot live ourselves' (FG2-NGO)

This friction is present in a similar way to the previous narrative. However, where the previous narrative responded to this friction by reiterating the necessity to 'save' nature for human well-being, this narrative feels less urgency to do this for the sake of human survival:

'At some point it will attack us if we don't learn that fast enough, and then nature will be fine and we will die, but if we learn it fast enough, then there will be a balance and nature will be absolutely fine, and we as a human species, beings will also be fine.' (FG2-NGO)

This quote seems to give a horrific scenario, where nature will be fine and humanity will die, and a beautific scenario, where both nature and humans will be fine. However, little value and emotion is attached to both scenarios. In contrast to other narratives, the horrific scenario actually is not framed as very horrific. There seems to be an acceptance either way, and thus an acceptance of the ontological insecurity that comes with the horrific scenario. This narrative continues to argue that it might not be about 'saving' nature and humanity, but more so about accepting different degrees of vulnerability:

'If we consider nature, we are part of nature, and like we're all together, then it's mostly maybe about vulnerability and how much vulnerable we want to be in that

sense. [...] I think considering how much vulnerability we are able to accept, for us ánd nature. I think maybe it's more about that question.' (FG2-NGO)

This question about how much vulnerability we need to accept remains unanswered within this storyline, but the question itself shows a realisation that a beautific win-win scenario might remain out of reach, and with that an acceptance of ontological insecurity. Also, by identifying yourself with nature ('we are part of nature'), you also identify yourself with those parts of nature that will survive climate change and the biodiversity crisis, repressing the threat to ontological security. Nature that is resilient, and will prevail even if it is 'destroyed', is the object of desire within this storyline:

'I tend to agree that's what your ideal state would be of nature that can be by itself. But if you look at the Netherlands with the dioxide deposition, all the humans that are going into it, I think it's an illusion to think in a very urbanised area that you can have a nature that just goes by itself because then you have all the exotic species.. And so you don't get a pristine nature, that's I think, well when, I think about nature restoration, I would say you want to go to a balanced ecosystem that can go by itself or you can take some wood from or some whatever you want to take from it, and then it just keeps going. But I think that's not always possible, and then you need to intervene multiple times, because you have all these influences from the outside' (FG2-NGO)

The desired scenario where nature is resilient and can sustainably support humanity does not seem directly in reach. The Obstacle that prevents this scenario from being met is the current way society interacts with and exploits nature, which is seen to lack awareness of our dependence on nature. Human intervention, for example through ecosystem restoration, is seen as needed to still be able to get to the desired state of resilient nature.

The hope that is gained from the idea that nature will prevail, might be related to the way nature is seen as the foundation of all life in this narrative:

'*Nature is life for me, and it's very precious, and I think a good way to view it is by looking at the Earth, which is this pretty, you know, for us, it's big, but relatively speaking, it's a very small thing that's floating in a lot of nothingness, and the only reason we're here is because for some weird reason, nature was able to exist on that small, small sphere, in nothing. And I think that's, like on a very deeper level of what I feel nature is its life in a way, and it's the fundamental thing of, of everything*.' (FG2-NGO)

The idea of nature as a symbol of life being a constant factor seems to offer ontological security. Put differently, the material constancy of nature (Banham, 2020) offers ontological security, regardless of the uncertainty of human survival. In addition, the meaning attached to the subject's relation with nature also informs a sense of identity:

'So of course I am connected with nature in general, so in my daily life I also go to forest to relax and I need this but, somehow I miss my own nature no, so, the birds that I can identify the sounds that I can identify so sometimes even when when I am calling, like on a working call with Brazil, I just ask can you be silent because I need to listen the birds no, because it's the sound of the birds that for me fills the environment and here even after 10 years sometimes I go and I try to be connected but it's not my identity no so I think it brings out also identity for me' (FG2-NGO)

Being away from a specific experience with nature that informs this sense of identity here leads to a longing for the subject's 'own nature'. This is related to Banham's (2020) idea of

nature being symbolic for a consistent self-narrative, where the sound of the birds leads to a sense of consistency and identity, tied to the feeling of being home. Important to note is that this identity is here threatened by a physical distance, and not necessarily a loss of species due to the climate and biodiversity crisis. This connection to one's own identity offered in the relation with nature seems to go hand in hand with the connection to other people and relaxation:

> *'I think it's what really sounds for nature for me is the connection maybe. And not only connection with nature, but also with people and how it helps also, at least personally, like, slow down and be more mindful, maybe'* (FG2-NGO)

Nature is a place where people can come to themselves, come together, and find rest. Placed in the context of Banham's framework (2020), nature is seen as symbolic of escape and refuge from the threats of the contemporary world.

In general, this storyline seems to be in the middle of the road with regard to ontological (in)security and the role of emotions and rationality: we see both ontological security and insecurity, and no strong emotions or rationality can be found in response to the threats of the Anthropocene. Although this narrative shows similarities with other storylines, in the way they see humanity as both the victim and solution and the way nature is seen as an object of desire, it sets itself apart with a lack of urgency around the solutions it suggests and what seems like an acceptance of ontological insecurity.

4.4 We have to reconnect to nature

This storyline, predominantly found among policy makers but also present in the focus groups of NGOs and students, places emphasis on the need for society to reconnect to nature, and views this reconnection as the change that is necessary to solve the climate and biodiversity crisis. This narrative argues that there is a distance between nature and people, and people have lost the connection to nature and the knowledge about why (nonhuman) nature is important for humanity. This is seen to in turn threaten nature and humanity. The threat to the intrinsic *and* relational value of nature and species is emphasised in this narrative, as opposed to the survival of humanity (which can be articulated through more instrumental values). It is thus not so much the need of nature for the survival of humanity that is stressed, as it was in previously described narratives, but nature is seen as intrinsically valuable, and humans are part of that nature. No ontological security is gained from the idea that a version of nature will always survive, as argued by the previous narrative:

> *'That completely strips all intrinsic value from everything that's existing right now. So you say everything can just go to hell, it doesn't matter, because at some point it will return. But I don't, I don't agree with that. Because right now, there's still so much, so much to preserve and to cherish and to just throw everything away like: yeah, well, we will all die, everything's fine. Everything will die. Yeah, yes! But yeah'* (FG2-NGO)

This narrative thus articulates the threat of the Anthropocene as something that will lead to a loss of the intrinsic value, which is often mentioned by referring to pristine or untouched nature. At the same time, the importance of the relational value of all nature, not just pristine nature, is frequently mentioned:

> *'Everything has intrinsic value, so to speak, some things have more value than others, I also see a link with, us humans are just animal species and in that I also see a connection with nature, because yes, ultimately, if you as part of that ecosystem, you will notice that there are dependencies. So what is the thing that has more value? That is what helps maintain this life of which we are a part and those positive dependencies that you want to continue to promote.'* (FG1-PM)

This way, the value of nature becomes more human-centred, in contrast to the intrinsic value of pristine nature. This relational value is seen as essential for mitigating the climate and biodiversity crisis:

> *'If you look at nature policy, it has of course always been very strongly focused on the intrinsic value of nature, while in recent years much more attention has also been paid to, say more the instrumental value of nature, ecosystem services and things like that. What remains a bit underexposed is what we started with in the discussion, is more about the relational value of nature and if you look at that even more, you see on the one hand, you say what's in it for me, why do we do this? You have to make that very clear to citizens, or for societal support, or the societal legitimacy of that nature policy, make it very clear what kind of benefits, or what kind of things nature also offers, but also what, you can also connect with their relational values of nature'* (FG1-PM)

In other words, awareness of the dependencies of humans on (non-human) nature is seen to be crucial to get to a point where humans and nature live in harmony. This awareness is argued to be achieved through spreading more information, and making clear to citizens what the benefits of protecting nature are for them. An increase in awareness should in turn contribute to the ultimate desired solution, reconnecting to nature. What this relationship to nature should be like, is not explained. The way 'reconnecting to nature' is described as (an essential part of) the solution, is seen as common sense, and the values and beliefs that inform this idea are not explored in depth. The idea of a good 'relationship with nature' seems to be naturalised in this discursive response, and is often put in the context of indigenous communities:

> *'Nature is the basis of our existence, and we have to pay much more attention to what it can offer us, and also nature-based solutions, which I think is a fantastic example. Eh.. Yes, getting in touch again, getting in touch with nature which some peoples, eh, are still very good at'* (FG1-PM)

This (romanticised) idea of the relationship indigenous communities have with nature is desired, and seems to represent a beautific scenario:

> *'There you also beautifully show the contact these people have, let's say with nature, because they understand so well how it works, what they can get out of it, and, yes, that sometimes leaves me completely surprised when I'm on holiday, really that I felt a bit ashamed, that I thought yes, we just take a paracetamol if things aren't going well, so to speak, and they can, so to speak, manage with nature'* (FG1-PM)

The idea that we should *re*connect to nature, with indigenous communities as an example, shows how this narrative seems to find ontological security from the idea that an initial order, an initial relationship with nature, can be reestablished. The emotions attached to this beautific scenario, in combination with a strong desire, makes this narrative high in fantasmatic qualities. The fantasmatic qualities of this desire to reestablish an initial order, sets this narrative apart from others, which focus more on creating a *new* order. This initial order represents nature as an object of desire, where nature is pristine, and untouched by

humans. However, at the same time, this narrative argues that humans are part of nature, and recognising this is a crucial part of the solution. Nature that is pristine, untouched, *and* integrated into human life is thus the object of desire. The reestablishment of an initial order also comes with a struggle between control and vulnerability:

> *'If we want to integrate nature more again, then the things that originally led us to this point, namely those dangers such as diseases, such as the threats of wild animals, and we must also deal with them and create a new way of openness towards that, and what does that mean for our safety?'* (FG1-PM)

This struggle is also tied to the dependencies of humans on nature, and the relational value discussed before:

> *'On the one hand, it is about control. And, that also has to do with power. And on the other hand, it is about vulnerability, such as the recognition that you are part of a larger whole and that you are also dependent on it.'* (FG1-PM)

Letting go of the malleability of nature and accepting the physical risks that come with that does not only lead to insecurity of safety, but it can also be seen as letting go of the malleability of nature as the object of desire, and with that an acceptance of ontological insecurity. Put differently, there seems to be an inevitable insecurity that comes with the dependencies of humans on nature that is desired to be unspoiled, uncontrolled. This narrative continuously seems to balance between ontological security and insecurity, informed by what seems like conflicting desires.

The way in which this narrative shows desire for nature as a symbol of something untouched, 'unspoiled' by the contemporary world, seems to be more than just offering escape and refuge to humanity, as the intrinsic value is stressed independently from humans. Here, I would rather say that nature is seen as symbolic of the nonhuman, through which ontological understandings are constructed (Banham, 2020). When it comes to *experiencing* this intrinsic value and the relationship with nature, ontological security is gained from nature as a symbol of escape and refuge of the contemporary world:

> *'At that moment you are often just really on your own for a moment, and I really think that is one of the most beautiful moments, to experience nature, and its force, from the water, from the wave, from nature around you, and if you are there and you see the view, that is one of the most, yes, those are one of the most beautiful experiences, and my relationship with nature at its best'* (FG1-PM)

The idea that nature that offers this escape and refuge will become less attainable for future generations leads to ontological insecurity (similar to the loss of a generational consistent self-narrative as described before):

> *'[Spitsbergen] is one of the most untouched parts of the Earth, just if you go in one direction at a certain point, you're just not going to meet anyone anymore. That's just... that's hardly possible anywhere in the world anymore [...] I became a father this year, and I really want to take my child there someday, but by the time it will be fun for him to go there I just don't know if there will be any polar bears at all'* (FG1-PM)

There is a clear discrepancy between pristine nature as an object of desire, and the way ontological security can be experienced through a relation with nature. The object of desire, pristine nature as symbolic of the nonhuman, is inherently unattainable since the experience of this nature by humans would 'spoil' it at the same time. There thus seems to be friction between the ontological security gained from the experience of nature as symbolic of escape

and refuge, and ‘unspoiled’, pristine nature as symbolic of the nonhuman. This friction can in turn lead to ontological insecurity. This seems to show that the object of desire is not always in line with the meaning attached to a relationship with nature that leads to ontological security.

When articulating the threat to ontological security, this narrative shows clear emotions such as sadness and despair. However, creating more awareness among society about the interdependencies between humanity and (nonhuman) nature is argued to be achieved through spreading more information, and making clear to citizens what the benefits of protecting nature are for them. The idea is that providing knowledge will lead to better decisions by the public, similar to the knowledge deficit model, which excludes the role of values, emotions and experiences in reaching the solution. The articulation of the solution is thus framed in a much more cognitive/rational manner than the articulation of the threatened values of nature.

4.5 Every decimal counts

This storyline, shared mainly among students, some scientists and also found in the Trouw and NRC newspaper, shows a great amount of urgency, and seems to be most openly ontologically insecure. Capitalism and fossil fuels are seen as direct threats to the survival of human and nonhuman nature. The consequences of a lack of action for humanity are nuanced by acknowledging the inequity of the climate crisis, in which some (mostly Western) people have contributed most to global warming, while those who have contributed less (e.g. the Global South) will suffer the most. The need for a holistic approach is emphasised, which does not only take ecological factors, but also the socio-economic context into account. Humanity in its entirety is thus not seen as the cause of the climate and biodiversity crisis, but the finger is more specifically pointed towards shareholders of fossil fuels and the institutions of capitalism.

This narrative emphasises the need for action to dismantle these threats, and articulates the threats of the Anthropocene in a definitive way. Action needs to be taken right now, or else humanity, and a lot of nonhuman nature, will not survive. This can also be seen by the use of 1.5 degrees as a strict limit for survival of humanity. Even though this narrative recognises the slim chances of warming to stay below 1.5 degrees Celsius, it still emphasises the importance of 1.5 degrees as a diplomatic weapon:

> *‘The benchmark of 2 degrees was only included in a climate agreement for the first time in 2009. It's basically an arbitrary limit. [...] That threshold, which was previously arbitrary, has become an evocative benchmark. [...] When scientists are asked about people, as the NOS did last year, hope fades. Almost all of them think that the Paris goal of staying well below 2 degrees by the end of the century will not be achieved. The same image comes from visits to researchers abroad. Not surprising: if the current policy continues, the heating will be around 3 degrees. [...] Perhaps no longer an achievable goal, the 1.5 degree can still remain an important diplomatic weapon in climate negotiations.’* (Bijlo, 2023b)

The intrinsic and relational value of nature are emphasised, similar to the last narrative. However, where the last narrative argued that stressing the relational value of nature can increase support for nature conservation, this storyline questions whether this is desirable:

> *'Because I think what is really happening now is that we are looking at what kind of nature we as humans get the most value out of and that then becomes a national park, so to speak... And that is the kind of nature that we value and by which we capitalise nature, like yes, this is what we as humans get the most value from, so this is what should be protected, while perhaps other parts of nature which we attach less value does not get [that protection], and is that fair?'* (FG3-ST)

Instead, this narrative tries to move away from this anthropocentric view, and argues in favour of a more ecocentric view:

> *'Maybe you can improve the connection with nature a bit [...], if you do not only see that as something that should be for us humans, but also for nature itself. It might sound a bit vague, but… So that's actually more like, that's what they call an ecocentric view.'* (FG3-ST)

In addition to dismantling capitalist structures and the reliance on fossil fuels, fundamental questions are asked about the future when discussing the solution to the global ecological crises. This storyline argues that reflection is needed on what we want to see in our future, to reevaluate our view of welfare:

> *'I think we also have to think a lot about what we want, what kind of future do we want as human beings? Also, and that we have to define it, or kind of redefine it.. I think there is a lot of unrest, political unrest, everywhere, or often around us and that we have to look into that, okay what is our future as human beings, and nature? I also really think about the term notions of a good life. I'm reading a lot about that in my literature and that we also, that we almost lose sight of that in terms of, okay, ecosystem restoration, how much money here, and this and that, and that you almost have to go back to okay, but what do we actually consider a good life?'* (FG3-ST)

In contrast to the previous narrative, which argued to go back to an initial order, this narrative seems more progressive as it asks open questions about the future: what do we actually think is a good life? At the same time, this narrative also argues in favour of *re*connecting to nature, and rediscovering a joyful relationship with nature as a way to move to a more harmonious relationship between humanity and (nonhuman) nature:

> *'How do we want to protect ourselves, that people really discover or rediscover the intrinsic value and the connection with it, and in turn not necessarily protect a specific nature, but rather, automatically protect it because you want to protect yourself'* (FG3-ST)

Here, the interdependencies between nature and humanity are mentioned in a positive manner. Where other narratives emphasise the friction between humanity being both a threat to nature, as well as dependent on it (a sort of negative externality), this narrative turns this around and argues that protecting humanity will go hand in hand with protecting nature (positive externality). These are two sides of the same coin, but with a different (negative or positive) emphasis. Also, emotions (such as joy) play a central role in this rediscovery of nature, as opposed to the emphasis placed on knowledge to increase this relation in other narratives. In addition to this (re)discovery of the relationship between humanity and nature, civil disobedience of engaged citizens is seen as the driving force behind progress in solving the climate and biodiversity crisis:

> *'The driving force behind this, in my opinion, is the concerned people. The people who say, things are not going well and they have knowledge about that, and they*

show that things are not going well. These are the scientists in general, and the engaged citizens' (I1-SC)

The responsibility and power for enabling a solution lies in politics, according to this narrative. However, politics are also seen as the Obstacle that hinders a solution from taking place. The way this Obstacle prevents humanity from reaching a desired scenario is expressed with anger and frustration:

> *'All those signatures are just not worth a damn. [...] All those goals set by international treaties to control biodiversity or to control and restore biodiversity. Not a single one of those, not a single, zero of the international treaties, made it, never, never, not one. So those signatures don't mean anything, that's just window dressing. Excuse my language. So on the one hand, long-term political goals are being set, also within Europe. But if the farmer starts protesting and shuts down the country, those goals are just as easily taken off the table. So those politicians have no balls.'* (I1-SC)

The signifier of 1.5 degrees takes a central role in this narrative. 1.5 degrees is a limit to 'stay alive', and the concept of 1.5 degrees itself must be 'kept alive' (Bijlo, 2023b) through societal and political action. The concept of 1.5 degrees is used as a symbol of survival, both to signify that additional decimal of warming will be catastrophic for survival of human and nonhuman nature (insatisfaction with a lack of action), as well as the urge to strive for every decrease in warming (a call for action). Here, exceeding 1.5 degrees leads to a horrific scenario, and staying below 1.5 degrees leads to a beautific scenario. This signifier is used in a fantasmatic manner, as it gives a black and white prospect of the future, where strong desire is placed on the beautific scenario of staying below 1.5 degrees of warming.

This narrative shows a different approach to the relationship between humans and nonhuman nature than we saw in the other narratives. Here, the object of desire is a relationship with nature where humans can experience the value of nature through a sense of amazement and belonging, as well as acknowledge the inherent value of nature for nature itself. This is tied to the way ontological security is gained from a relationship with nature. The ontological security at stake, next to being dependent on 1.5 degrees as symbolic of the future and human vulnerability, also seems to be gained from the peace and completeness being in nature seems to offer:

> *'I then felt a kind of very, also a very great peace come over me and I thought yes, I am just here now, really part of it, and yes, perhaps a kind of very fundamental, abstract feeling of disappearing into it'* (FG3-ST)

The sense of being part of a bigger entity than oneself leads is even experienced as addictive by some:

> *'I'm addicted to letting myself be kind of overwhelmed by, yes, the greatness of it sometimes'* (FG3-ST)

It could be that the inherent lacking of the subject, which leads to ontological insecurity, is covered by placing oneself into an overwhelming environment and feeling a part of something greater. Nature seems to give a sense of belonging, which in turn offers peace and amazement. Placing this into the framework of Banham (2020) is quite difficult, as it can be interpreted in different ways. The feeling of being able to disappear into nature, could be seen as a way to escape and seek refuge from the threats of the contemporary world. However, the idea of being a part of something also speaks to a sense of identity, or a consistent self-narrative.

Both emotions and rationality are visible in the way this narrative articulates threats and ontological security, although in comparison to the other narratives, this storyline more frequently uses emotions to articulate the threat to and experience of ontological (in)security. In the focus groups and interviews, people often mentioned how they gained (scientific) knowledge about the state of (humanity's relationship with) nature, and responded emotionally to that newly acquired knowledge. At first, this response frequently was despair or grief. However, this in turn is immediately responded to with what seems like a restlessness, as these emotions are not seen as productive, and these emotions are transformed into a call for action:

> *'It is a bit depressing to read how bad things are going, but there is of course no reason to then just leave it at that.'* (Staver, 2023)

Although these negative emotions are acknowledged within this narrative, they are given little space to remain just those negative emotions. Either there seems to be a need to turn these negative emotions into positive emotions, or they need to become fuel for action:

> *'I also don't agree with the elections at all, but I also think, you know, then I'll just convert my anger into something, into something powerful and into something that I stand for'* (FG3-ST)

Rationality and knowledge thus seems to inform emotions, and emotions such as despair and worry inform action to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis, which in turn eases the ontological insecurity:

> *'I want to be reassured. I don't want to be stuck in a gapers' block during environmental disasters or stand in despair next to the scorched earth. No, I want to see how the fire is put out. How a better world is being built. I want to look the beast in the eyes, see the refineries, the naphtha crackers and the blast furnaces being dismantled and replaced with my own eyes.'* (NRC, 2023b)

The way in which this narrative converts emotions such as anger, frustration and despair into action shows its repressive nature. The experience of negative emotions, for example allowing yourself to be depressed about the ecological crises, is inhibited and instead emphasis is placed on taking action to reach a desired future scenario. This repression is a way to cover or cope with the anxieties that lead to ontological insecurity.

In short, capitalism and fossil fuels are seen as the threats to the intrinsic and relational value of nature that inform ontological security. Rationality then informs emotions, which are translated to be fuel for action. Engaged citizens are seen as the motor behind change, whilst politics are both the Obstacle on the road, as well as the holder of power to make (fundamental societal) change happen. The strong focus on solutions to ensure the survival of human and nonhuman nature, and on taking direct action shows the repressive nature of this storyline.

5. Discussion

The discussion consists of two parts. First, the answers to the research questions will be explored. This will be done by comparing the different storylines based on their structure, main themes, fantasmatic qualities, ontological (in)security and their ascribed roles of rationality and emotions. Based on these comparisons, the storylines will be grouped into discourses. Second, ontological security, emotions and discourse will be explored through the lens of modernity, environmental justice, and future perspectives. This is done in order to get a better sense of what ontological security means in our society, where insecurity may stem from, and how this in turn affects our society. For readability's sake, I will refer to the different storylines in numbers, following the order as they were presented in results (e.g. storyline 2 refers to the narrative 'Climate change and the biodiversity crisis are inherently human issues').

5.1 Discursive responses to ontological insecurity

5.1.1 Articulation of the threats of the Anthropocene to ontological security

The articulation of the threats of the Anthropocene, and the discursive responses to these threats differ most significantly in four ways: their emphasis on the role of humanity, what ontology is perceived as threatened, arguing for either a conservative or transformative solution, and their use of the signifier 1.5 degrees. First, the role of humanity in the articulation of the threats of the Anthropocene to ontological security differs across the storylines. This ranges from storylines emphasising how humanity is the cause, victim and solution of these threats (storyline 2), to recognising the consequences for humanity but distancing the threats and responsibility from the daily lives of people (storyline 1), to stressing the importance of battling these threats for the survival of (nonhuman) nature (storyline 4 & 5), to accepting both the responsibility of humanity for these threats and the consequences for human survival (storyline 3). The role of humanity is thus emphasised in different parts of the structure of the narrative: the threat to ontological security (storyline 3), what is perceived as threatened (storyline 1 & 2), and the solution (storyline 2, 4 & 5). In other words, the Paradox of the Anthropocene (Hamilton, 2017) can be seen to varying degrees across all narratives, but humanity being both the subject and object of security is most explicitly present in storyline 2. Storyline 1 seems to recognise this Paradox differently from the other storylines, as it does see humanity as both the subject and object of security, but emphases other threats (the war in Ukraine) as bigger concerns than the global ecological crises.

Second, the storylines range from an anthropocentric to ecocentric focus in their articulations of the threats of the Anthropocene to ontological security. Storyline 1 for example, is less concerned with the intrinsic value of nature than instrumental values, reiterates the separation of nature and culture (by approaching nature as an adaptive entity outside human responsibility) and has an anthropocentric focus in the articulation of the threat. In comparison, storyline 2 also has an anthropocentric focus through its articulation of humanity as the cause, victim and solution of the ecological crises. However, this narrative values nature through its species and living components, showing a biocentric view as well. Storylines 3, 4 and 5 emphasise both the intrinsic and relational value of nature, to different degrees. They seem to have a more ecocentric view (which is explicitly mentioned in storyline 5), and argue to see humanity as part of nature.

Third, the discursive responses are either more conservative, focusing on an initial order, or more progressive, focusing on a solution to establish a new order. Storyline 1 and 4 seem

most conservative, albeit in different ways. Storyline 1 frames climate change as a natural phenomenon, which does not necessarily disturb an initial order. It thus does not show great interest in transformative change, but focuses on technological solutions that will allow for a continuation of current ways of living. Storyline 4 does recognise the global ecological crises as great threats, and argues for change that *re*establishes an initial order: a harmonious *re*connection to nature, where the relation of indigenous communities with nature is the desired state. This is in contrast to storyline 2, 3 and 5, which all argue more explicitly for a transformative change that leads to a *new* order: either by deconstructing institutions such as capitalism or defining new understandings of a good life in the Western world.

Lastly, 1.5 degrees is used as an empty signifier across the discursive responses, used to either stress or deny the threat of climate change to ontological security and the need for action. Storyline 1 and 5 seem most opposite of each other in their use of 1.5 degrees. Where storyline 5 uses 1.5 degrees as a symbol of survival to signify a beautific and horrific scenario, storyline 1 uses 1.5 degrees to downplay the urgency of tackling climate change. The difference between storyline 1 and 5 in their articulation of the global ecological crises as threats to ontological security seems to show mixed agonism/antagonism. Storyline 1 delegitimises and stereotypes the 'alarmist' response present in storyline 5, stating it is an irrational response and creating distance between themselves and storyline 5. Not recognising the legitimacy of the 'opponents'' response as a way of forming a hierarchization indicates an antagonistic, non-neutral conflict (Carpentier, 2018). However, storyline 1 and 5 do not seem to show a need for the 'destruction' of the other. Instead, they share a common symbolic space in which the same signifier (1.5 degrees) is used, but given a different meaning. This common symbolic space makes the relation between the discursive responses not properly antagonistic and indicates agonism (Carpentier, 2018). The interaction between the chains of equivalence of storyline 1 and 5 are thus characterised by a mix of antagonism and agonism. Storylines 2, 3 and 4 have less explicit use of 1.5 degrees, but could be placed in between storyline 1 and 5, leaning more towards the urgency of storyline 5. For example, storyline 2 argues that 1.5 or 1.6 degrees warming might not make a huge difference, thus not using it as a symbol for a horrific or beautific scenario, but it is seen as an important diplomatic instrument to ensure action.

5.1.2 Fantasmatic and psychic responses to the threats to ontological security

The fantasmatic and psychic responses to the threats to ontological security differ in their object of desire and its perceived attainability, as well as the response to the unattainability of the object of desire. Across the discursive responses, nature that is resilient, adaptive, or able to 'bounce back' is a common object of desire (e.g. in storyline 1 & 3). This often goes hand in hand with nature symbolic of material constancy being a source of ontological security. The difference between storyline 1 and 3 is here, that storyline 3 gains security from nature being a constant factor, regardless of human survival, whilst storyline 1 gains security from material constancy as it decreases (and denies) the threat of climate change to human survival. We can also see a struggle between the object of desire and human benefit (security) within one narrative. In storyline 4, a struggle arises from nature untouched by humans as the object of desire, and nature that can be experienced by humans and offers escape and refuge. Here, pristine nature is inherently an unattainable object of desire as the way it offers escape and refuge through human experience will also spoil it. Such friction can in turn lead to ontological insecurity. This in contrast to storyline 3, which shows an acceptance of ontological insecurity, and acknowledges that a beautific win-win scenario where both humanity and nature will survive might be out of reach, and instead focuses on nature surviving regardless of human survival. By identifying yourself with parts of nature that will survive either way, a sense of ontological insecurity is repressed. The perceived attainability of the object of desire thus also differs across the storylines, and affects its ontological (in)security.

When this unattainability triggers a sense of anxiety, we see two different ways in which the narrative deals with this: disavowal and repression. Disavowal is the most visible in storyline 1, where threats to ontological security are denied in a similar manner to what Giddens described as sustained optimism: a continuous faith in the reason of the Enlightenment period, where technology will be able to answer any risk (Possamai-Inesedy, 2002). In addition, storyline 1 uses 1.5 degrees in a cynical manner to downplay the threats to ontological security, which is in line with Giddens' description of cynical pessimism through its cynical nature (Possamai-Inesedy, 2002). Disavowal is also seen in storyline 2, which puts the current ecological crises into a timeline beyond human experience, arguing that nature will eventually bounce back. Repression is seen the strongest in storyline 5, which converts emotions into a call for action against the threats of the Anthropocene. Here we see a clear correspondence with Giddens' description of radical engagement, which refers to the active engagement in contestory action, like done in social movements (Possamai-Inesedy, 2002). The most acceptance, and the least reliance on coping mechanisms (or a 'healthy' amount of suppression of anxiety), is seen in storyline 3. This acceptance is similar to the response Giddens described as pragmatic acceptance, in which the dangers of our current society are acknowledged but a focus lies on pragmatic participation in day-to-day life (Possamai-Inesedy, 2002). Although storyline 3 lacks the cynicism storyline 1 contains, it has similarities with cynical pessimism through its direct engagement with anxieties caused by risk in an emotionally neutralising nature (Possamai-Inesedy), resulting in an emotional 'lightness' and sense of acceptance.

Although the storylines may employ different responses to anxiety, the way in which they use coping mechanisms is comparable. This can be seen specifically around the theme of elitism in storyline 1 and 2. In storyline 1, the discussion around climate change is framed as an elitist topic, distanced from the daily lives of the public. This way, the threat to ontological security is denied. Storyline 2 on the other hand, is used by people (mostly scientists) who have been framed as the 'elite' by storyline 1. Narrative 2 does not deny the threat to ontological security, but focuses mainly on quality of life that is threatened. Put bluntly, this narrative seems to have the 'luxury' to be concerned mainly with quality of life, and not human survival, and argues that population growth is part of the problem, whilst the majority of people on Earth do not have this luxury. Here, I do recognise that this narrative nuances between the people who contribute most to climate change and those who suffer most, but this did not seem to affect the framing of what is perceived as threatened. Whilst narrative 1 takes ownership over one's own security by distancing itself from the 'elitist' climate debate, narrative 2 can afford to focus on quality of life instead of human survival. Differently put, these two narratives have different ways in which the threat to ontological security is denied, but use a similar technique: separating one's own ontological security from the security that is threatened.

5.1.3 Delineation of discourses using ontological security, emotions and rationality

Taking the aforementioned articulations of the threat and fantasmatic responses to ontological insecurity together with the different ascribed roles of emotions and rationality, three discourses have been delineated: a technocratic discourse of which storyline 1 is part of, in which strict boundaries are articulated between effective rationality and ineffective emotions, a nuanced (cognitive, but also emotional) discourse consisting of storyline 2 and 3, and an emotional and ontologically insecure discourse emphasising relational values consisting of storyline 4 and 5. These discourses have been visualised in figure 3, where the storylines have been placed on a matrix consisting of an x-axis showing the range from ontological insecurity to security, and a y-axis ranging from emotional to rational.

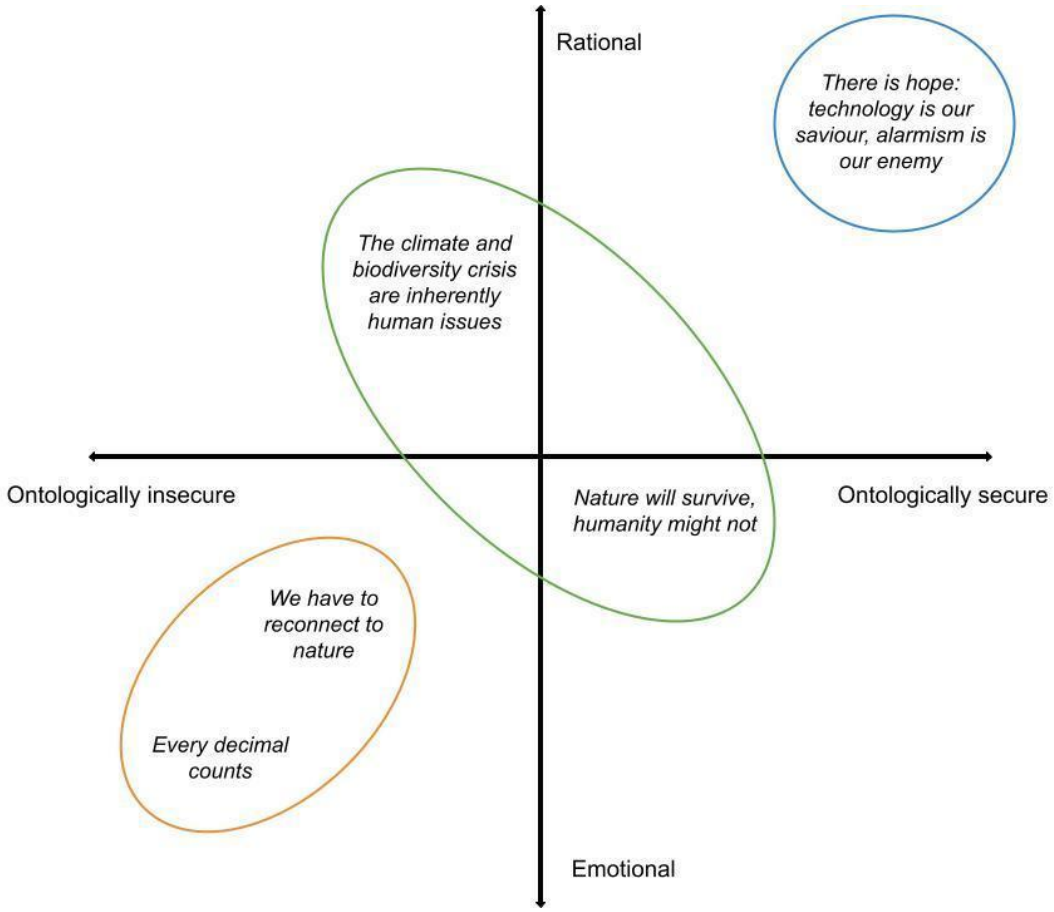

Figure 3. This figure shows the storylines placed on a matrix of ontological (in)security and emotionality to rationality. The storylines are also grouped into three different discourses, as illustrated by the yellow, green and blue ovals.

Starting with the y-axis, the different discourses range in their emphasis on the role of emotions or rationality. They all seemed to delineate the roles of emotions and rationality to some degree. Storyline 1 did this most drastically, by depicting (negative) emotions as irrational and ineffective, showing quite explicitly the dualism between emotions and rationality as described in the theoretical framework. Storyline 2 did show more emotional responses to the perceived threats, but also deemed emotions as inefficient in dealing with climate change and biodiversity. Storyline 3 showed some frustration when it came to solving the global ecological crises, but was otherwise quite 'light' in expressing emotions in response to ontological insecurity due to its accepting character. Storyline 4 showed clear emotions discussing their (potentially disappearing) relation to nature, but still offered a rational solution where knowledge should lead to a reconnection to nature. Lastly, storyline 5 explicitly acknowledged the role of emotion *and* rationality, and used emotions as fuel for change, making it the most visibly emotional narrative. This is in great contrast to storyline 1, which framed this use of emotions as inefficient 'alarmism', which could be another sign of agonism or mixed agonism/antagonism between the two storylines. In general, the narratives thus seem to focus on *functional* emotions: do they contribute to dismantling the threat? If not (which is mostly the case, except for storyline 5), rationality is seen as a superior 'tool' in dealing with ontological insecurity.

When we combine the ascribed roles of emotionality and rationality with the different responses to and articulations of the threats, storyline 1 can be considered the biggest outlier, through its technocratic narrative and denial of the threat to ontological security. This is also likely due to the fact that this narrative was found mostly in the Telegraaf, which is a right-leaning newspaper targeting an audience which generally sees the global ecological

crises as less of a concern/priority than the participants of the focus groups and interviews, and the NRC and Trouw newspapers. The social group represented by the Telegraaf thus has less proximity (politically, demographically) to the social groups of the other storylines among each other. In future research, it would be interesting to broaden the range of social groups in the focus groups and interviews to for example, groups with other occupations (e.g. farmers and non-nature related occupations) and socioeconomic conditions, to see how their discursive responses compare to each other, and to those presented in this research.

On the other side of the matrix, storyline 4 and 5 have been grouped together based on their more emotional nature, and their expressed urgency to mitigate the climate and biodiversity crisis. This urgency reflects their sense of ontological insecurity, as they express worry and despair about the survival of human *and* nonhuman nature. These narratives also seem most fantasmatic through their use of beautific and horrific scenarios in a black and white manner. In addition, their emphasis on the relational value of nature is in line with Mattijssen et al (2020), which show how more emotional discourses often contain relational values, whilst rationality discourses focus more on instrumental values (as seen in storyline 1). Storyline 2 and 3 seem less concerned with survival, and show more nuance by either gaining security from the idea that nature will survive regardless of humanity, or by focusing just on quality of life. Placing these two storylines on the matrix in relation to each other is quite difficult, as they both show signs of security and insecurity, emotionality and rationality (or lack of emotionality). Storyline 3 has ultimately been placed as more ontologically secure not despite, but because of its acceptance of ontological insecurity.

I argue that these groupings could be defined as different discourses based on their construction of meaning in response to the ontological insecurity triggered by the Anthropocene. Not only does power produce a discourse and appropriates arguments as rational and/or irrational (Sharp & Richardson, 2001; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011; Foucault, 1980), power also produces the role of emotionality. This role of emotionality specifically is what I think more clearly distinguishes these different discourses from each other than just focusing on what ensemble of ideas and concepts they reproduce.

5.2 An exploration of ontological security, emotions and discourse

5.2.1 What ontological security? - Ontological (in)security in the Anthropocene

The Paradox of the Anthropocene destabilises the constructed split between humans and nature, which has been dominant in (Western) nature conservation. In the discursive responses discussed in this research, we see the two expected responses to this destabilisation as indicated in the introduction: relational and emotional discourses that emphasise the intertwinement of humans and nature (storyline 4 and 5), and discourses that re-claim their own identity by distancing itself from the threats to human and nonhuman nature (storyline 1). It is interesting to note however, that the relational and emotional discourses seem less ‘successful’ in gaining ontological security than the rationality discourse. This might be due to the way storyline 1 responds to insecurity by returning to the ontology of first modernity, denying the threat of liquid modernity, whilst the other storylines move towards a pluralistic ontology in response to liquid modernity.

Storyline 1, with controllable and resilient nature as its object of desire, shows a continuous faith in the reason of the Enlightenment period through its focus on technological solutions, thus gaining ontological security from first modernity logic. The assumption underpinning first modernity is that the social and natural world follow measurable and predictable laws, and

objective knowledge, science and rational thinking are seen as the key to human progress (Possamai-Inesedy, 2002). First modern societies defined nature based on its exploitation: nature was a neutral resource (with endless growth), outside of society which could be used by humans. The belief was also that scientisation could perfect the instrumental control over nature by process of demystification (Beck, Bonss & Lau, 2003). However, a culture will inevitably face (and contain) anomalies, which are also framed as 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 2003). The primary concern of nature conservation is then the creation of distinctions and the maintenance of categories (such as the nature-culture divide), as way to create order (purity) in response to anomalies (Milton, 2013; Arts, Fischer & van der Wal, 2016). It is then a lack of structuralism that makes relational storylines (2-5) more prone to ontological insecurity when faced with anomalies or threats, whilst technocratic discourses (storyline 1) reiterate and maintain the boundaries they rely on.

Based on the logic of first modernity, humanity has taken control of nature (and themselves), which makes risks (which were the responsibility of God before), now the responsibility of humanity (Possamai-Inesedy, 2002). These risks, such as the global environmental crises, are of a different magnitude and global nature than in the past, and thus become more difficult to quantify and open-ended, instead of having a foreseeable end (Possamai-Inesedy, 2002). The global ecological crises of second modernity (in the Anthropocene) confronted humanity with the limits of natural resources, thus making it increasingly difficult to perceive humanity's relation with nature as solely instrumental and controllable through rationality (Beck, Bonss & Lau, 2003). Early modernist rules of causality fail to deal with these ecological risks. Beck then argues that we are living in a risk society: continuously being faced with contingency and living in a complex and less controllable world (Possamai-Inesedy, 2002), which leads to ontological insecurity. The modernisation of society has reached a stage where it radicalises itself: reflexive modernisation (Beck, Bonss & Lau, 2003). Baumann described this as liquid modernity: a self-intensifying, obsessive and compulsive modernisation, which causes the institutions and shapes of social life to be liquid, or in other words, not maintain its structure for long (Bauman, 2013). Reflexive or liquid modernity thus entails a transformation in which all principles and institutions, including the nature-culture divide, are destabilised (Beck, Bonss & Lau, 2003). The idea that control has slipped out of our hands, leads to an insecurity and uncertainty that can only be soothed once we construct the tools that enable us to retake control (Bauman, 2016). A reflexive view of nature here is thus an increase of consciousness and awareness that mastery of nature is impossible. It is this reflexive view that is visible in the more relational storylines (2-5), which instead of returning to the controlling ontology like storyline 1 did, move with the changing, destabilised ontology of reflexive modernity.

So why has this liquid/reflexive/second modernity not resulted in the complete disappearance of a nature-culture divide? What could explain the persistence of boundary maintenance and rationality in discursive responses to the threats of the Anthropocene? All institutions of society are based on definitions that delineate between natural definitions such as life and death, and risk and danger. Although these institutions and systems of action have been destabilised by the growth of hybrids, a complete disappearance of delineations would result in the inability of such institutions and systems of action to function (Beck, Bonss & Lau, 2003). The disappearance of delineations would thus not offer the tool that enables us to retake control and soothe insecurity, as it could lead to even less control. Therefore, instead of a disappearance of such divisions, the theory of reflexive modernisation argues that there will be a plurality of natural definitions, and thus a plurality of understandings of nature (Beck, Bonss & Lau, 2003). Plurality here means that boundaries are not a given, but will be a choice (Beck, Bonss & Lau, 2003). Boundary maintenance will not be merely a process of delineation, but a variety of attempts of delineation with a variety of ways in which these will be brought into doubt.

To conclude, in response to the threats of the Anthropocene we see two ways in which ontological security is tackled: either by focusing on ontology, or focusing on insecurity.

Storyline 1 eases the sense of insecurity by reiterating the human-nature divide and control over nature, maintaining the ontology that underpinned first modernity. Storylines 2-5 on the other hand, seem to have less security as they deviate from the structures of boundary maintenance that offer control, by instead trying to overcome the nature-culture divide, and thus moving away from first modernity ontologies. Together, the storylines show the plurality of natural definitions as part of second/reflexive/liquid modernity.

5.2.2 Whose ontological security? - Representation, performativity and global environmental justice

Our response to the global environmental crises is not just a matter of our own security, but a matter of representation and reality-construction beyond our own experience through the performativity of discourses. The way we respond to and articulate ontological insecurity in relation to nature, can in turn shape the ontological (in)security of ourselves and others, as well as the way we engage with human and nonhuman nature, affecting global environmental justice. Relating this to the nature-culture divide, this structuralism is not just boundary maintenance between nature and society, but also entails a divide between 'us' and 'them'. The idea of the Great Divide by Bruno Latour is that the nature-culture divide, referred to as the Internal Great Divide, has led to the External Great Divide: the divide between the Westerners (us) and all other cultures that are in a presumed state of 'pre-modernity' (them) (Latour, 1992; Elam, 1999). Other scholars, such as Luce Irigaray, have added to this external divide by also noticing other divides in modernity, like the one between the masculine and feminine (Elam, 1999) and the related dualism between rationality and emotions (Williams, 1998).

The Great Divide has sociopolitical consequences for the way we deal with global ecological crises, as defining something as either natural or cultural determines what nature is, what or whom we save nature from, who will be saved or threatened by this 'saving' of nature, and who will do the saving. The Great Divide thus also has consequences for whose ontological security is represented. For example, storyline 3 seems to gain security from the idea that nature will survive through the identification with a part of nature that will continue to live even if humanity won't. Here, the idea that nature will survive can only offer consolation to those in the position to identify with nature that will not be lost through the global ecological crises, as well as those whose ontological (and physical) security are not already directly threatened. Another example can be seen in storyline 2, where the focus lies on a threatened quality of life, instead of survival. These examples of storyline 2 and 3 illustrate a wider shared 'disconnect' in Western discursive responses to the climate and biodiversity crisis. This is a disconnect between positions such as the framing of degrowth or technology as the solutions to global ecological crises, focusing on quality of life, and the positions of large parts of the world's population who are struggling to survive due to a lack of clean water, food, growth, and development (Latour, 2011). In other words, yes climate change is a threat to quality of life, but also: there are billions of humans that are (already) facing direct threats to survival, which is underrepresented in the shown discursive responses. The External Divide between 'the West' and other people is thus also found in the (incomplete) representation of ontological (in)security. I doubt this exclusion of other (non-Western) security in these discursive responses was a conscious act, as many narratives also explicitly mentioned the inequity between those who contribute to the global ecological crises and those who suffer from them, but it is a powerful act.

The way we construct reality with discourses, including the boundaries we set, is determined by power (Foucault, 1980; Flyvbjerg, 2000). This power is productive, it creates discourses, knowledge and subjectivities (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011; Foucault, 1980). In turn, discourse is performative and the dominant frames used and representations of human and nonhuman nature shape our actions in response to ecological crises (Turnhout, 2018; Turnhout, Neves

& De Lijster, 2014). These dominant frames determine what is deemed as rational, and with that what is seen as an effective policy decision, which will in turn shape the environment (Turnhout, Neves & De Lijster, 2014; Rutherford, 2007). This has enormous impacts on environmental justice: the way we engage with the environment cannot be separated from the way we engage with people and communities, justice is integrated throughout every aspect of environmentalism (Schweizer, 1999; Mohai, Pellow & Roberts, 2009).

This is where I also want to offer some reflection on my own discursive choices present in this research. Although the use of the term 'the Anthropocene' can stress the responsibility of humans in the environmental crises we face, it risks reiterating the nature-culture divide and ignores the situatedness and complexity of the climate and biodiversity crisis. Or as Haraway put it: 'the term Anthropocene, by emphasising the 'anthropos' and etymologically ignoring other species, portrays itself as the result of a human species act; in the same manner that ecosystem services represent the Earth as if it were an accounting system and thereby became a tool for the capitalization of the planet' (Haraway et al., 2016, p. 539). In addition, my repeated use of the term '*global* ecological crises' could reduce the experience of ontological insecurity to a homogeneous experience, whilst the effects and experiences of climate change and biodiversity loss are heterogeneous across time and space (Olwig, 2011). This claimed uniformity does not exist, as it oversimplifies the shaping of the complex socio-ecological systems that constitute the Earth's landscapes (Olwig, 2011). Moreover, the concept of *ecological* crises effectively distances itself from the cultural, and referring to climate change and biodiversity loss as 'crises' can be seen as a way of reassuring that this is a state that will pass, whilst it is our relationship with nature that is irreversibly mutating as a result of it (Latour, 2017). I recognise that through my use of signifiers such as 'the Anthropocene' and 'the global environmental crises' (and most likely many other signifiers and discursive elements I either fail to see myself or do not have the space to delve into here), I too engage in boundary maintenance and internal and external divisions that can in turn affect reality construction. Therefore, I by no means claim to have the answers to what a 'good' response to ontological insecurity should be, but I do think the social groups that took part in this research (in which I am also included as the researcher and a student) have the responsibility to be mindful of the way their knowledge creation and power to construct discourses in turn constructs a reality that has sociopolitical and environmental consequences. In order to be held accountable for this responsibility, it is crucial to reflect on questions such as: what ontological (in)security is articulated in discursive responses? Whose ontological (in)security is represented? And: how do we move forward?

5.2.3 Discourse, ontological security and emotion: future perspectives

Addressing the existential anxiety triggered by the Anthropocene is not a matter of resolving it, as this anxiety is an inevitable and continuous experience of life. It is our place of departure which should change: we need to rethink the framework of the nature-culture divide so that new sociological imaginations can move us forward (Goldman & Schruman, 2020). This way, we can move away from conservative politics of fear, and move towards embedded politics of becoming.

Ontological insecurity, including that which arises from a destabilised nature-culture divide, is often expected to be met with politics of fear. Anxiety among the public is expected to lead to support for conservative and reactionary politics (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). However, the problem of politics of fear as an answer to existential anxiety, is that it leaves this anxiety unattended. Although anxiety and fear are often used synonymously, anxiety is characterised by a range of emotions and a variety of behaviours, whilst fear only resolves in two behaviours for security: fight or flight. A heavy investment in politics of fear can maintain a sense of ontological insecurity as it often only deals with physical security (e.g. building walls to keep 'outsiders' out), whilst ontological security is about a sense of security around one's

subjectivity. Politics of fear thus mask rather than address ontological insecurity (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). Security strategies of control and a nature-culture divide are thus not sustainable in our liquid modernity. So what then, is an alternative that will address this existential anxiety by making room for a range of emotions and behaviour, subjectivity and emphasising a security of becoming?

Our place of departure should not be the idea that we can 'fix' the 'ecological crises', as technofixes, (the illusion of) taking more control over nature, or bringing humans closer to nature all stress the nature-culture divide. Moreover, this is not a crisis that will pass, it will inevitably mutate our relation with nonhuman nature, which is why we should not engage with hope alone as a way of passing time (Latour, 2017). The focus on solutions that will make these 'crises' something we will get past, places the object of desire out of reach, and will thus not lead to a sense of security. Instead, we have to find a way to experience the full instability of ecology and the mutation of our relation to it (Latour, 2017): we have to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016). From this place of departure, we can understand that the planet is full of interconnected agents, and seeing this can lead us out of the exploitations of the Anthropocene (Latour, 2017; Åsberg, 2017). This awareness calls for humble, situated knowledge which is inclusive across different perspectives of people and places (Nightingale et al., 2020). Placing plural ways of knowing the world at the centre of ecological knowledge, instead of overemphasising the data on external (climatic) threats rooted in a conceptual nature-culture divide, allows us to confront the Anthropocene with embedded politics (Nightingale et al., 2020).

Here lies an opportunity for science to take responsibility for 'staying with the trouble' and moving past the exploitations that have led us to the Anthropocene. In order for knowledge-creation to be embedded and reflective of different perspectives, I argue that recognising the role of emotions in response to ontological insecurity is a vital but underrepresented aspect of facing the Anthropocene. So far, discourses have mostly been delineated based on shared hegemonic signifiers or discourse coalitions, focusing on power-rationality configurations and neglecting power-emotion configurations. However, ontological (in)security is inherently an emotional phenomenon, rather than cognitive. I have shown how this is also visible in the discursive responses described in this research, where the role of emotions and rationality seemed to better delineate different discourses than signifiers and coalitions. If we want to understand our current and (re)construct our future place on this Earth whilst inevitably being faced with ontological insecurity, we have to pay attention to the emotive aspects of reality construction. A bigger focus on emotions and the interplay between emotions and rationality will allow for a better understanding of how people respond to the Anthropocene through a broad range of emotions and behaviours, and can in turn make space for politics of becoming instead of conservative politics of fear.

In order to facilitate a more emotive discourse analysis, I have experimented with a musical analysis to mobilise other senses and balance the cognitive textual analysis of discursive responses. This was done with the purpose of making both myself, the researcher, and you, the reader, more aware of the emotional experience of/behind a discursive response. This is inevitably an interpretative process, as discourse analysis always is, but I believe that it forces an explicit space for the interplay between discourse, emotions, rationality and ontological security that is (partly) outside of the cognitive. Art, whether it be music, dance, visual art, etc., is capable of bridging the experience of reality and emotion in a way that textual language often can't, making the emotive elements of a discourse more visible. Consequently, art enables an emotion to be an articulated process, constituting objects in which the emotion and structure of the object coincide (Anders, 1950). It is through the articulation of emotion as an integral part of reality-constructing, that I think art serves a significant purpose in understanding discursive responses to ontological insecurity (and discourses in general), which is why I recommend a further exploration of art in the methodology of discourse analysis in future research.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, three different discourses in response to the ontological insecurity triggered by the Anthropocene have been delineated. First a technocratic discourse was found, which reiterates the nature-culture divide and strictly differentiates between effective rationality and ineffective alarmism in response to insecurity. This discursive response re-claims its identity by distancing itself from the threats to human and nonhuman nature through disavowal, and shows continuous faith in first modernity logic accompanied with controllable and resilient nature as its object of desire. Second, a nuanced discourse in which we both see a healthy repression of ontological insecurity (acceptance) as well as the disavowal of insecurity through articulating the threats of the Anthropocene beyond human timescales. Third, an emotional and visibly ontologically insecure discourse was found, which emphasises the relational and intrinsic value of nature and is highest in fantasmatic qualities through its articulation of desire and beautific and horrific scenarios as a way of repressing insecurity. Both the nuanced and emotional discursive responses show a reflexive view of nature, with an increasing consciousness of the lack of human mastery over nature. This shows a clear discrepancy with the first narrative in the focus on ontology instead of insecurity: whilst the technocratic discourse eases insecurity by reiterating the nature-culture divide and control over nature, following the same ontology of first modernity despite its destabilisation by the Paradox of the Anthropocene, the nuanced and emotional discursive responses contain a larger amount of insecurity as they focus on a changing ontology which lacks boundary maintenance.

This research has shown the importance of power-emotionality configurations for understanding discursive responses to ontological insecurity. This understanding was gained by placing environmental anxiety in a political, collective and unconscious context as a novel approach, moving beyond the individual, psychological experience of anxiety. The different discursive responses have been delineated based on their construction of meaning in response to insecurity, in which the ascribed roles to emotions and rationality play a significant role. This analysis has in turn shown that reflexive, fantasmatic and emotional discourses are more likely to foster transformational change, whilst rational discourses are more likely to be conservative and maintain the status-quo. The recognition of the role of emotions and ontological insecurity can allow for embedded political and societal responses to the current rise of right-wing politics (of fear), offering space for politics of becoming whilst mitigating the mutating relationship between human and nonhuman nature.

Future research is recommended to build on this recognition of power-emotionality configurations through a combination of emotive and cognitive methods and to assess (the performativity of) current political and policy discourses, in order to provide insight in the values represented in nature conservation and critically evaluate the diverse constructions of human-nonhuman relations. This should include research in a wider range of socio-demographic groups, especially those underrepresented in this research, as well as a further exploration of the methodological purpose of art in analysing the emotive articulation of discourses.

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Appendices

Appendix I. Newspaper articles

IPCC 2023 report (20-27 March)

Trouw

Bijlo, E. (2023a, March 24). Leuk experiment: ouderen niet meer laten stemmen. *Trouw.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67VD-V661-DYRY-X39G-00000-00&context=1516831.

Bijlo, E. (2023b, March 25). De 1,5 graad: eerst een politiek doel, nu een laatste strohalm. *Trouw.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67VM-TGM1-DYRY-X2GG-00000-00&context=1516831.

Engels, J. (2023, March 21). IPCC waarschuwt nu echt voor het allerlaatst. *Trouw.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67TS-XPK1-DYRY-X2DN-00000-00&context=1516831.

Jansen, D. (2023, March 25). Hersenwinden op krantenpapier. *Trouw.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67VM-TGM1-DYRY-X2HW-00000-00&context=1516831.

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NRC

(2023a, March 25). De mens is oorzaak, slachtoffer én de oplossing voor klimaatverandering; Commentaar. *NRC.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67VN-28S1-F03R-S309-00000-00&context=1516831.

(2023b, March 25). Tata Steel: vergroenen of ontsnappen; Column De plannen zijn bij Tata het probleem niet, concludeert Rosanne Hertzberger ; Column. *NRC.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67VN-28S1-F03R-S2YV-00000-00&context=1516831.

Aan de Brugh, M & Luttikhuis, P. (2023, March 20). Zijn de klimaatmodellen te optimistisch? ; De kritiek op klimaatmodellen groeit; Er is veel discussie over de bouwstenen voor klimaatrapportages, want schetsen die niet een te optimistisch beeld? *NRC.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67TK-6D41-F03R-S10V-00000-00&context=1516831.

Aan de Brugh, M. (2023, March 21). Wie nu geboren wordt, zal extreme hitte meemaken . *NRC.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67TT-5GR1-F03R-S1MR-00000-00&context=1516831.

Appels, D. (2023, March 27). Twee kinderarmen steken zwaaiend uit de modder. *NRC.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67W2-V0D1-F03R-S00N-00000-00&context=1516831.

Kruk, M. (2023, March 27). Noodzaak klimaat wil maar niet doordringen; column . *NRC.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67W2-V0D1-F03R-S012-00000-00&context=1516831.

Luttikhuis, P. (2023, March 22). Te weinig, te veel, te vies - water staat onder druk ; Waterconferentie Te veel, te weinig, te vies: watervoorziening is ernstig in gevaar. *NRC.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67V1-4M31-JCMP-20C4-00000-00&context=1516831.

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Weijers, N. (2023, March 25). Klimaatactie in tijden van massa-extinctie; Opinie Klimaat Waarom Niña Weijers zich aansluit bij Extinction Rebellion; Ik ben niemand. En toch; Waarom klimaatactie volgens schrijver zin heeft. . *NRC.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67VN-28S1-F03R-S2XM-00000-00&context=1516831.

Wismans, L. (2023, March 25). Willen we weten hoe de klimaatknoppen werken?; Tweegesprek Sleutelen aan het klimaat: moeten we dat onderzoeken of toch liever niet?. *NRC.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67VN-28S1-F03R-S320-00000-00&context=1516831.

De Telegraaf

(2023a, March 25). Klimaatpaniek in media op retour. *De Telegraaf.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67VN-1751-DY4D-Y30V-00000-00&context=1516831.

Besteman, T. (2023, March 21). 'Er is nog hoop voor het klimaat'; IPCC: nieuwe technieken tegen opwarming. *De Telegraaf.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67TT-FT91-JBNC-71MP-00000-00&context=1516831.

Zimmerman, S. (2023, March 22). 'Klein land kan niet veel'; Lezers hekelen paniekerige toon klimaatrapport IPCC. *De Telegraaf.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67V1-6551-JBNC-750N-00000-00&context=1516831.

KNMI’23-climatescenarios (9-16 October)

Trouw

Havermans, O. (2023, October 14). Ode aan demiezerdag. *Trouw.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69CV-P931-DYRY-X0MV-00000-00&context=1516831.

Straver, F. (2023a, October 10). Het weerbericht van de toekomst: snikhete zomers, druilerige winters. *Trouw.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69C0-7BK1-JC8X-6011-00000-00&context=1516831.

Straver, F. (2023b, October 10). 'Ook dat horrorscenario van 17 meter willen we benoemen'. *Trouw.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69C0-7BK1-JC8X-6010-00000-00&context=1516831.

NRC

Bergshoef, L & Wismans, L. (2023, October 10). In ieder scenario wordt het warmer in Nederland. *NRC.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69C3-3781-F03R-S00F-00000-00&context=1516831.

Schreuder, A. (2023, October 9). 'Armste wijken zijn de warmste wijken'. *NRC.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69BW-3XP1-JCMP-200G-00000-00&context=1516831.

Van Egmond, K. (2023, October 13). Klimatologen hadden feller mogen waarschuwen. *NRC.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69CR-0P51-JCMP-2012-00000-00&context=1516831.

De Telegraaf

(2023b, October 10). Brieven. *De Telegraaf.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69C2-YXJ1-JBNC-703C-00000-00&context=1516831.

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(2023d, October 11). Brieven. *De Telegraaf.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69C9-22B1-DY4D-Y3X6-00000-00&context=1516831.

(2023e, October 12). Angst aanpraten het makkelijkst; Brief van de dag. *De Telegraaf.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69CG-XK51-JBNC-703S-00000-00&context=1516831.

(2023f, October 12). Brieven. *De Telegraaf.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69CG-XK51-JBNC-703W-00000-00&context=1516831.

(2023g, October 13). Brieven. *De Telegraaf.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69CP-XF61-DY4D-Y03M-00000-00&context=1516831.

Jager, K. (2023, October 10). Alarmbel luidt wel erg hard; Experts: meest gebruikte klimaatscenario KNMI onwaarschijnlijk. *De Telegraaf.* https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69C2-YXJ1-JBNC-700R-00000-00&context=1516831.

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Appendix II. Focus group note-taking form

Date:
Start time:
Stop time:
Moderator:
Note-taker(s):
Location:
Category of group:
Participants:

Q1. Nature conservation: what nature deserves/requires protection?

Brief summary/Key points	**Quotes** (notable or key quotes)	**Observations** e.g. body language, points left unfollowed, one/mood of conversation)

Q2. Nature restoration: what is nature restoration? What is possible?

Brief summary/Key points	**Quotes**	**Observations**

Q3. What is the future of nature in our world?

Brief summary/Key points	**Quotes**	**Observations**

Q4. Knowledge: What is the role of knowledge in nature conservation?

Brief summary/Key points	Quotes	Observations

Q5. Power: What power matters for nature conservation?

Brief summary/Key points	Quotes	Observations

Summary and reflections:

Appendix III. Semi-structured interview guide

Introduction

- Brief introduction of my master thesis
- Explain what the interview will look like ('I distilled some storylines from document analysis and focus groups, I would like to show these to you and ask for your opinion, whether you recognise them, etc')
- Ask for consent for the use of data and recording the interview (participants have already received and signed a consent form beforehand)

Storylines

Each of the following storylines were read out loud, and briefly introduced to the interviewee. Guiding questions for each of the storylines:

- Do you recognise this storyline?
- What do you think of this storyline?

1. There is hope: technology can save us, we should watch out for alarmism
2. Humanity is the cause, the victim and the solution
3. Every decimal of warming counts
4. We should recover our connection to nature
5. Nature will survive, humanity might not
6. We must let go of control and accept our vulnerability

Questions

- What roles do rationality and emotions play in the way you respond to the biodiversity and climate crisis?
- How would you describe the cause, victim and solution to the biodiversity and climate crisis?

Conclusion

- Is there anything you want to add or say?
- Do you have any other remarks, about the statements or the interview itself?
- Do you have questions about the research?