

## Comparative Language Analysis

The recent bushfires in Victoria have ravaged much of the state's country region and have so far killed more than two hundred people. As a result, many concerns and issues have been raised about whether the situation has been handled correctly, the type of punishment arsonists should receive and the reasons as to why the bushfires occurred in the first place. An editorial featured in the Herald Sun showed the tabloid's stance on the topic of Police Chief Commissioner Nixon being appointed as the head of a new government bushfire department, while an opinion piece by Barney Zwartz, appearing in The Age on 12 February, 2009, argued in an appalled tone that a provocative Christian leader was unequivocally wrong in his statement that the Victorian bushfires were a punishment from God. A cartoon by Spooner, which also featured in The Age newspaper, contends that arsonists are the lowest of scum who deserve no compassion whatsoever.

The Herald Sun February 11, 2009 editorial 'Ms Nixon, we need you now' is a response to the selection of Chief Commissioner Nixon as the new head of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority. The tabloid contends that Nixon shouldn't be trying to juggle two very important roles at the same time; instead she should resign early in her role as the Police Commissioner to concentrate on her new position. The tone is forthright while the driving style is one of urgency, which can be felt as soon as the title is read. The Herald Sun believes that Nixon should be solely concentrating on being "fire supremo", a hyperbolic term which is repeated in the editorial to exaggerate the importance of Nixon's new occupation. A cause and effect relationship is used to position the readers to agree with the Herald Sun's opinion by suggesting possible reasons as to why the bushfire situation was so terrible. The purpose of telling the audience all the things that must be looked into by the VBRRA stresses that Nixon has a lot of work ahead of her. The flee-or-fight plans and earlier evacuations are among the concerns that Nixon will need to look in to after she is finished "readying herself" for her new role. The editorial utilises the persuasive technique of emotional appeals to position readers in a moving way, writing of the "homeless" townspeople "living in tents" and "sleeping in cars in towns reduced to ashes". This makes the readers feel outraged, as the fire-affected people are innocent and don't deserve to be living in such a way. It also forces the readers to picture themselves in the situation of the countrymen and women, creating a sense of insecurity as they imagine what it would be like losing everything they own, even family and friends. It manipulates the audience to agree with the viewpoint of the tabloid as they would want the VBRRA to act straight away, not waiting on Nixon to be free of other commitments. An appeal to patriotism is also used as towns touched by the bushfires are described as "quintessentially Australian". This is an appeal to the audience's sense of identity and positions them to share the editorial's contention because they want to protect and care for their country and its people, not let it all crumble to pieces due to Nixon trying to manage two extremely important roles in Victoria. A photo of Police Chief Commissioner Nixon with the Prime Minister and the Victorian Premier is featured at the top of the editorial. The purpose of this photo could be to show Nixon with two authority figures who are doing as much as possible to improve the bushfire ravaged communities, while she is positioned to the side, not able to put her entire concentration and effort into the situation due to her current ties with the Victorian Police. The fact that she is wearing her police uniform emphasises her current, significant role as Chief of Police.

In contrast, Barney Zwartz in his opinion piece 'Failing to understand the nature of an understanding God' uses an appalled, attacking tone to dismiss claims by Christian leader Danny Nalliah that the

Victorian bushfires are a punishment from God for decriminalising abortion. The writer uses evidence in the form of Bible stories to reject Nalliah's claim that God spoke to him through a dream to say that he had "removed his protection" from Victoria. Zwartz comments that the New Testament "strongly suggest otherwise" that God speaks through dreams and that "the Bible refutes the idea that suffering is God's punishment". Through the use of forceful language, Zwartz transforms his opinion and interpretation of the Bible into what comes across as factual evidence to the audience. He then goes on to pose a rhetorical question to the readers: "Do such Christians really believe God punishes the innocent to teach the guilty?" After Zwartz's previous manipulation of evidence, the intended answer to his question is very clear and encourages the readers to agree with his view. The rhetorical question also serves to manipulate the reader into combining all the ideas the writer has presented in his argument to agree with the implied answer.

Spooner's cartoon of "The special bunker reserved for an arsonist" reflects the opinion that arsonists are poor excuses for human beings who are not worthy of any sympathy whatsoever. The drawing, published on February 12, 2009, has a very hostile tone and shows a tiny, square cell with no natural light, apart from a small barred opening at the top of the door. The plain light bulb on the ceiling of the cell exudes a bleak light that highlights the cracked walls with bricks protruding through and the dirty conditions below. The sinister looking chains attached to an either blood or urine stained cell wall suggest some kind of torture or sleep deprivation, akin to those which occur in prisons in countries such as China. The bucket sitting on the cell floor is immediately identified by the readers as the toilet which the prisoner must use. This one item clearly outlines just how severely the arsonist is being treated as the right of having a flushing toilet is denied. The liquid mess around the bucket communicates to the audience that the cell has not been cleaned and no one feels the need to clean it either. Also on the floor is a bowl of unidentifiable food, with what looks like flies hovering above. This is not only unhygienic, as the flies have probably been crawling around in the bucket, but shows how the prisoner is being treated like an animal of some sort. The place where the arsonist is supposed to sleep is simply a hard, cold, wooden bench chained to a wall. There is no mattress or blanket which further develops the image of the arsonist being treated like an animal. The whole cartoon comes together to show how the artist believes an arsonist should be treated like and what he or she deserves for their crime. It is a very powerful drawing that compels the readers to really consider the actions of the arsonist and the things he or she has done to earn such despicable surroundings. The harshness of the cartoon provokes a shocked response by highlighting how the cartoonist believes arsonists should be dealt with.

Both the editorial and the opinion piece use repetition to emphasise their contentions to position the readers. From the beginning of Zwartz's piece the word "wrong" is reiterated to accentuate his contention that Nalliah's claims are completely incorrect. This constant use of repetition forces the readers to accept the view that Nalliah is wrong while also making it harder for the audience to think otherwise, as it is being drilled into their heads' persistently. The repeated word completely writes off Nalliah's controversial opinion, creating a picture of the Christian leader being consistently wrong. In the same fashion, 'Ms Nixon, we need you now' uses the word "now" constantly to emphasise the sense of urgency involved with the reconstruction of bushfire affected communities. The repetition of "now" is first introduced to readers in the heading, but is frequently used throughout the piece, even in capital letters at one point. The belief that the Police Commissioner should be only focused on the rebuilding and recovery of many country towns "now" is emphatically stressed time and time again to the readers, continuing to build the pressing importance of the situation.

All three pieces are comparable in the fact that they all share the persuasive devices of emotive language and words with specific connotations. The editorial uses emotionally-fuelled words such as

“traumatised” to describe the country communities and “crushing” to express Police Commissioner Nixon’s big workload. These adjectives spark emotion inside the readers and persuade them that the combination of two jobs is far too much for Nixon if she is supposed to help the distressed country region. Similarly, Zwartz uses emotive language in his opinion piece to attack Danny Nalliah’s claims. He pairs this language with negative connotations to further criticise Nalliah. Words such as “controversial”, “ludicrous” and “abhorrent” are used to create a bad image of the Christian leader and his “rantings” throughout the piece. Spooner’s cartoon features a subtitle at the top that also uses language with negative connotations. The word “bunker” is used to describe the cell for the arsonist. This word conjures up an image of a war-like hide out to the audience that fugitives, such as Osama bin Laden, use. The bunker is described as “special”, which is usually a word with a positive connotation, but in this case the complete opposite is intended. Once the readers look at the cartoon, they notice that the cell is special in a very ghastly, shocking way. Each example of emotive language in the three pieces is used to position the readers by evoking strong responses that pressure them to agree through fear or disgust.

Unlike Zwartz and Spooner’s pieces, the Herald Sun editorial argues logically and reasonably throughout its entirety, without using scathing undertones. Zwartz attacks Nalliah and the cartoon shows aggression and outrage towards arsonists, while on the other hand the editorial actually compliments Nixon’s “dedication and determination” rather than criticising her for not resigning as the head of Victoria Police. Therefore, the tone of this piece contracts drastically to that of the cartoon and opinion piece, creating entirely different images in the readers’ minds and positioning them in a dissimilar way.

Barney Zwartz’s opinion piece concludes with a subtle call to readers to disbelieve Nalliah’s dream and opinions about the Victorian bushfires. In contrast, the editorial finishes with a sarcastic remark on Ms Nixon’s job “muddle”, stating that it “gets a B-minus”. This leaves readers with a sense that the confusion over her two roles must be eliminated if she is going to do her job as “fire supremo” effectively. On the whole, the cartoon’s images impact on the audience successfully as they picture the cell’s scene long after first viewing it.