

# The Safety of *Al Jazeera* English Journalists in Egypt

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## Abstract

*The imprisonment of Al Jazeera English (AJE) journalists (Australian Peter Grete, Egyptian-Canadian national Mohamed Fahmy, and Egyptian Baher Mohamed) in Egypt between 2013 and 2015 reflected the recent ten agenda items of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) about the safety of journalists (Pöyhtäri & Berger, 2015). Building on the relevance of press theories (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956; Curran, 2002) as well as developmental and peace journalism (Carpentier, 2007 cited in Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2007) as a theoretical basis, this paper examines the twenty-one month reportage of the AJE case by public broadcasters such as AJE, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). It assesses whether the UNESCO's Safety of Journalist agenda was covered. A "mixed method" (Kolmer, 2008), quantitative and qualitative content analysis research design, was used. Four hundred and ninety-five articles from the three broadcasters' coverage were analyzed in two stages which overall began from the day (December 29, 2013) of arrest of the AJE trio until a week after Fahmy's and Mohamed's final release (September 30, 2015). The analysis found that items noted in the UNESCO's Safety of Journalists' agenda were not overtly spelt out in the coverage by the broadcasters but cloaked under a wider press freedom framework that hung over the case. Findings also reflected the critical need to address the safety of journalists in Egypt and other parts of Africa, despite the democratic awakening of the 2011 Arab Spring.*

**Keywords:** *press freedom, imprisonment, limited press coverage, safety of journalists, Africa.*

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## I. Introduction

In 2015, according to Reporters without Borders (RWB), Egypt ranked 158 out of 180 countries in the Press Freedom Index while the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) ranked Egypt second only to China in the number of journalists' jailed or threatened in the course of their work (Masriyal, 2016). The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) said that threats to journalists include intimidation and harassment to restrictive policies, arbitrary detention, long term imprisonment, and even murder (IFJ, 2016). Egypt, with a

population of more than eighty seven millions, is the largest and most influential country in Africa (*BBC*, 2015a). The country has been in global spotlight in relation to press freedom and the safety of journalists after the much publicized news story about its long term imprisonment of the *AJE* trio – Australian Peter Greste, Egyptian-Canadian national Mohamed Fahmy, and Egyptian Baher Mohamed – between 2013 and 2015 (Agius, 2014). Other *Al Jazeera* journalists were jailed or tried in absentia<sup>1</sup> during this time, but this paper focuses on the *AJE* trio because of the intense global media focus on their case, and because it was the first time a westerner, such as Greste, would be jailed in Egypt post the Arab Spring.<sup>2</sup> The *AJE* trio was charged by the Egyptian court for allegedly reporting false news about the authoritarian regime and for associating with the blacklisted Muslim Brotherhood. These allegations highlight the wider press freedom issues in Africa, issues which are contrary to the libertarian and social responsibility philosophy of objective balanced reporting which hold governments and those in power to account (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). The trio was also charged for working as non-accredited journalists in Egypt and for broadcasting without a license, charges which relate to the safety issues of working journalists (Pöyhtäri & Berger, 2015).

In December 2015, in their prison consensus of Egypt, the CPJ said there were at least twenty-three Egyptian journalists held in local jails for reasons related to their reporting (CPJ, 2015a) This was the highest number of imprisoned journalists in Egypt since the CPJ began recording prison data in 1990 (*Al Jazeera*, 2015b). The CPJ also noted that the current Egyptian regime under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi “continues to use the pretext of national security to clamp down on [media] dissent” on its road to democracy (*Al*

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<sup>1</sup> *AJE* journalists (Sue Turton, Dominique Kane, Egyptian Ahmed Mansour) who were tried in absentia reside in Britain. *Al Jazeera* Arabic reporters (Egyptian Abdullah Elshamy and American-Egyptian Mohamed Soltan) staged long hunger strikes in prison and eventually got out (*Al Jazeera*, 2015d).

<sup>2</sup> The Arab Spring of 2011 and its associated democratic uprisings elsewhere in the Arab world (such as Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya), is now well documented (for example, Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2012).

*Jazeera*, 2015b). Al Sisi's crackdown on media dissent to restore democracy in politically unstable Egypt may be associated with what Nico Carpenter (cited in Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2007, p.157) called "peace journalism" or "developmental journalism". These strands of journalism resist the "principle of true neutrality in reporting when universal values such as peace, democracy, human rights, equality (gender and race), progress (social) and national liberation is (*sic*) at stake" (Carpenter, 2007 as cited in Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2007, p. 157). However, in Egypt the price to pay for peace journalism or developmental journalism is high. As the then imprisoned *AJE* journalist Greste said, "Rarely have so many of us been imprisoned and beaten up, intimidated or murdered in the course of our duties" (*Al Jazeera*, 2014a).

## II. UNESCO's Press Freedom and the Safety of Journalists Agenda

In June 2015, Reeta Pöyhtäri and Guy Berger (2015) from UNESCO's division of Freedom of Expression and Media Development Communication and Information sector noted that, "the safety of journalists has not been a popular topic of academic research" (p. 1). To address this deficit, on June 1, 2015, Pöyhtäri and Berger published UNESCO's ten point research agenda in relation to the Safety of Journalists (see Table 1), all of which are applicable to the *AJE* case in Egypt.

**Table 1**

### *UNESCO's Safety of Journalists Academic Research Agenda (June 2015)*

1	Rights-based issues, such as human rights and freedom of expression
2	Conflict issues, including war reporting and propaganda
3	Societal issues, for example the effect on the audience of threats to journalists' safety
4	Legal issues, such as legal and extra-legal tools to protect journalists

5	Practitioner issues, for instance journalistic ethics and the safety of freelancers
6	Psychological issues, including the effects of threats and self-censorship
7	Economic issues, for example the working conditions of journalists
8	Digital issues, including the threats to journalists' safety online
9	Thematic issues, such as safety in different journalistic beats (gender, ethnicity, environment and religion)
10	Educational issues, including covering safety in journalists' training

This paper examines the extent in which the UNESCO's Safety of Journalists' research agenda was reflected in the coverage of the *AJE* case by *AJE*, the *BBC* and the *ABC*. It is divided into four sections. The first section explores notions of press freedom and journalists' safety in Africa, with a focus on Egypt. It also examines how theories of the press (Siebert et al., 1956; Curran, 2002), peace and developmental journalism (Carpentier, 2007, as cited in Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007) relate to journalism on trial in Egypt and more specifically, the *AJE* case. The second section describes the mixed methods research (content analysis) used in this study and offers the rationale of why the reportage by *AJE*, the *BBC* and the *ABC* was analyzed. The third section examines the reportage analysis across two stages of analysis: stage one (arrest to trial and imprisonment); stage two (deportation, retrial and pardon). The conclusion sums up the significance and implications of the findings on the practice of journalism in Egypt, the African region, and the journalism profession in general.

### III. Literature Review

#### *A. Theories of the Press, Peace Journalism and Journalism on Trial in Egypt*

The right to free expression is a human right. This right also includes freedom of the

press, which is pivotal to UNESCO's Safety of Journalists' mandate (Pöyhtäri & Berger, 2015). The right of free expression is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was the first approved by UNESCO in November 1945. However, these rights are watered down in current day Egypt and in other parts of Africa. In 2016, the IFJ noted that Africa was fourth on the global list of journalists murdered while doing their job in 2015. Of the nineteen journalists deaths reported in Africa in 2015, thirteen were murdered in Nigeria, and five each in South Sudan and Somalia. A 2015 report entitled 'Getting Away with Murder,' the CPJ said that Somalia was ranked the highest with thirty unresolved deaths, while South Sudan and Nigeria were in the top fifteen with five deaths each (CPJ, 2015b, pp. 15-16). Egypt was not on CPJ's top list of murders in 2015, but it is a key country in Africa where the safety and impunity of journalists remain a critical issue.

According to Guy Berger (as cited in Delorie, 2012, p. 8) in 2012 the UNESCO in conjunction with RWB developed the "UN Plan of Action" on the "Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity" This was the first concerted effort within UN agencies, governments, non-government organisations (NGOs), civil society, academia and the media to create free and safe conditions for journalists and media workers in both conflict and non-conflict situations (Pöyhtäri & Berger, 2015). This paper abides by the definition of "safety" which the UNESCO defines as "a broad category that extends from preventive, protective and pre-emptive measures, through to combating impunity and promoting a social culture which cherishes freedom of expression and press freedom" (Pöyhtäri & Berger, 2015, p. 1). The term "journalist" was also broadly defined by the UNESCO and includes community media workers, citizen journalists and others (such as social media users) who may be using new media as a means of reaching their audiences, "but this paper focuses on the role of the professional journalist in the field" (Pöyhtäri & Berger 2015, pp. 1-2).

Despite being a country that claims to be on route to a developmental democracy post the

Arab Spring of 2011, it has been difficult for *Al Jazeera* journalists, and for other foreign and local media, to report on the political situation in Egypt under the authoritarian regime of President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi. Al Sisi came to power in May 2014 and began controlling the media because he saw it was a vital instrument of social control during Egypt's transition to a fledgling democracy. According to Carpenter (as cited in Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2007), al Sisi's crackdown on media dissent could be seen as peace journalism or developmental journalism. The media landscape in Egypt is contrary to a libertarian and social responsibility philosophy, which advocates for a free press to report the news objectively and investigate the facts (Siebert et al., 1956). A free press does not exist in Egypt because journalists are muzzled if they report negatively about various regimes.

The Arab Spring uprising in 2011 ended the thirty year dictatorship by the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who was also a friend of the West, especially the United States. At eighty years of age, and at the time of writing this paper, the now fragile Mubarak remains in a military hospital, awaiting retrial for his role in the 2011 unrests (ABC, 2015a). Mubarak's downfall paved the way for Egypt's first democratically elected President, the former engineering Professor called Mohamed Morsi, who also was the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's oldest and largest Islamist organisation (BBC, 2013a). Morsi's Freedom and Justice political party had a problematic year in government, riddled by economic issues, judicial and constitutional controversies and citizen protests (Colvin, 2014). Morsi's power base was toppled in a July 2013 military coup, which was led by the then Field Marshall Abdul Fattah Al Sisi, who had worked under Mubarak. In May 2015, Morsi was tried in an Egyptian court in association with the prison outbreaks, which led to the January 2011 and June 2013 protests. He was jailed, and is currently awaiting the death sentence (ABC, 2015a).

Following Morsi's downfall, in November 2013 the interim government, under the

leadership of a former High Court Judge Adly Mansour, enacted an Anti-Protest Law to “eliminate the prominent revolutionary figures” (*Al Jazeera*, 2014a). This resulted in arrests of citizens, bloggers, activists, local and foreign journalists (Colvin, 2014). In late December 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood was blacklisted as a terrorist group because they were allegedly associated with a spate of bombings against the next regime, which also killed civilians (*BBC*, 2013a). This political purge highlights UNESCO’s Safety of Journalists’ agenda items, such as the threat to the wider societal, human rights issues and journalists’ safety off line and online (Pöyhtäri & Berger, 2015).

Under Mubarak’s and then Morsi’s leadership, the media system was seen as authoritarian because it allowed for some privately owned newspapers to exist, but the broadcasting remained in the hands of government and was heavily regulated via the application of licenses (Siebert et al., 1956). When Abdul Fattah al-Sisi was elected as President of Egypt in May 2014 (Colvin, 2014), the media system evolved into a combined authoritarian and soviet communist framework because instead of serving the public, all media served the government (Siebert et al., 1956). Also known as the “radical functionalism” approach, under this media system in Egypt all messages are “subjugated to authority” of “those in power” (Curran, 2002, p. 137).

In late November 2014, al Sisi’s regime appeared to lighten its authoritarian stance by enacting the Deportation Act of November 2014, which allowed the extradition of foreign journalists who have been reporting against the regime (*ABC*, 2014b). Months later, the regime tightened authoritarian framework when President Al Sisi enacted a new Terrorism Law in August 2015 where journalists are fined up to about US\$25,000 if they contradicted the official government’s versions of any terrorist attack (*BBC*, 2015a). For example, since late April 2016, the Egyptian regime has been considering legal action against *Thomson Reuters* news agency for negative news about the torture and murder of Italian university

student Giulio Regeni who was arrested in Cairo on terrorism charges (Trew, 2016). As H. D. Hellyer (د. إتش. @hahellyer), an Associate Fellow in International Security Studies at the Royal United Services Institute in London, said on Twitter on April 23, 2016, “If Cairo takes legal action against @Reuters, the fallout from the *Al-Jazeera* trial may look like a picnic in comparison.” The Egyptian terrorism law contravenes aspects of UNESCO’s Safety of Journalists’ agenda such as press freedom and human rights (Pöyhtäri & Berger, 2015).

### *B. Al Jazeera Media Network and Egypt*

The Egyptian regime has a problematic relationship with its wealthy neighbour, Qatar, a country that financially supports the *Al Jazeera* media network and the blacklisted Muslim Brotherhood. Egypt’s conflict with Qatar centers on *Al Jazeera*’s bias reportage against the Egyptian regime (ABC, 2015b). On July 8, 2013 the *New York Times* reported that twenty-two members of the staff of *Al Jazeera Arabic*’s Cairo office resigned because of the “biased coverage” of the ongoing Egyptian power redistribution in favour of the Muslim Brotherhood (Worth, 2013). However, the original station, *Al Jazeera Arabic*, which was set up on 1 November 1996 in Doha (Qatar), is known for standing up against dominant ideologies and its bias reporting (El-Nawawy & Powers, 2010). Circulation figures worldwide highlight that *Al Jazeera* media network provides news to over 220 million households across one hundred countries and is said to exceed the *BBC* in its global audiences and influence (ABC, 2014b). As the 2015 ‘Future of News’ report, commissioned by James Harding, Director of *BBC* News and Current Affairs noted, “[state-sponsored broadcasters in] China, Russia and Qatar [*Al Jazeera*] are investing in their international channels in ways [the *BBC*] cannot match (Singh, 2015).

In an 2015 opinion piece entitled “How Qatar Used and Abused Its *Al Jazeera* Journalists” for the *New York Times* by the then convicted *AJE* trio’s bureau chief, Fahmy,

he said that *Al Jazeera* “knowingly antagonized the Egyptian authorities by defying a court-ordered ban on its Arabic-language service ... [by continuing] to broadcast [Mubasher Musr] by satellite and internet from studios in Doha.” Fahmy claimed that the *Al Jazeera* management continued to use “the Cairo bureau of *Al Jazeera* English to give their scheme a veneer of international respectability.” Set up in 2006, with its head office in Doha, *AJE* is largely staffed by former *BBC*, *ABC*, or *Cable News Network (CNN)* journalists. Like the three broadcasters noted here, *AJE* prides itself on being an example of a libertarian and social responsibly press, where disclosure of information to prevent abuse of state power is paramount (Curran, 2002).

### *C. The AJE Trio Case in Egypt*

Unlike his Egyptian *AJE* colleagues – Fahmy (Bureau Chief) and Mohamed (Producer) – Greste (Reporter) was Australian. However, for the nine years prior to his arrest in Egypt, Greste had worked as a correspondent for *AJE* covering the Horn of Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and the Great Lake states. Based in Nairobi (Kenya), in December 2013, Greste was sent to Cairo to report on the political situation in Egypt and was assigned to work with *AJE* journalists on the ground, such as Fahmy and Mohamed. The trio worked from a media bunker in the Marriot hotel in Cairo because the satellite in the local office was jammed by local authorities. On December 29, 2013 Greste and Fahmy were arrested at the hotel, nicknamed the “Marriott Cell” by Egyptian authorities (Cooper, 2014). Mohamed was arrested at his home in the outskirts of Cairo. The trio were held without charge and sent to a Cairo prison (Cooper, 2014), an action which highlights the human rights as well as societal, legal and practitioner issues associated with the UNESCO’s safety of journalists agenda (Pöyhtäri & Berger, 2015). There was also another cell in this case, the “Mokattam Cell”, in the hills of Cairo where university students (Shadi Ibrahim, Khaled Abdelraoof and Sohaib Saad) were arrested in 2013 for allegedly selling iPhone footage of the June 2013

protest and the Raba Adawiya Square protest in August 2013 to *Al Jazeera*, a fact that Fahmy denied knowing about (Michelson, 2015). As Fahmy (2015) wrote in the *New York Times*, “The Doha management neglected to tell me that it was providing Brotherhood activists in Egypt with video cameras and paying them for footage,” and then “compromised” his *AJE* team’s journalism by editing “English-language news packages with inflammatory commentary” for the (now streaming only) *Mubasher Misr* (*Al Jazeera*) station. Fahmy argued that *Al Jazeera*’s managers had “crossed an ethical red line”. His comments highlight UNESCO’s practitioner issues in relation to journalism ethics. Fahmy and one of the students, Ibrahim, also claimed they were blindfolded and tortured during their interrogations by the Egyptian authorities (Michelson, 2015), which pinpoints the psychological threats noted in the UNESCO Safety of Journalists ‘agenda (Pöyhtäri & Berger, 2015).

The long, drawn-out trial of the *AJE* trio in Egypt between February and June 2014 was based on twelve hearings, but it was riddled with contradictory evidence. On June 23, 2014 the *AJE* case concluded in the Egyptian country and four charges were laid against the trio: (i) broadcasting, (ii) using technical devices without a license, (iii) spreading rumours and reporting false news to incite disharmony in Egypt, (iv) associating with the blacklisted terrorist group the Muslim Brotherhood. Greste and Fahmy were sentenced to seven years in jail, while Mohamed was given three years extra for allegedly carrying a spent bullet (ABC, 2014a).

There was global backlash by western governments, non-government organizations and massive social media campaign against the long term prison sentences. Following a formal appeal, the Egyptian High Court allowed for a retrial of the case in early 2015. Then, after 400 days in jail, on February 2, 2015, the Australian (Greste) was extradited under a new Egyptian Deportation Law (BBC, 2015b). On February 3, 2015 Fahmy renounced his

Egyptian citizenship (*Al Jazeera*, 2015a). On 12 February, 2015 Fahmy, along with Mohamed were released on bail but were ordered to remain in Cairo pending the retrial which began on February 23, 2015 and had nine hearings. During the retrial in early May 2015 the British Lebanese Human Rights lawyer, Amal (Alamuddin) Clooney, the wife of Hollywood actor and Oscar winner, George Clooney, helped Fahmy put a claim in a Vancouver court (in Canada which his country of residence since the 1990s) to sue *Al Jazeera* for one hundred million US dollars in punitive and remedial damages for its role in his conviction and imprisonment in Egypt (Caldwell, 2015).

Finally, on August 29, 2015 Fahmy and Mohamed received three year sentences from the retrial judge (Hassan Farid) in Egypt. Greste received the same sentence but in absentia (*Al Jazeera*, 2015c). In his ruling, Judge Farid said the *AJE* trio was not registered with Egypt's journalist syndicate, and that the journalists brought in equipment without the approval of security officials, broadcast false news on *Al-Jazeera* and used the Marriott hotel as a broadcasting office without permission (*Al Jazeera*, 2015c). These charges relate to the human rights, conflict, legal and practitioner issues in the UNESCO's Safety of Journalists' agenda (Pöyhtäri & Berger, 2015).

After the August 2015 ruling, the *AJE* trio sought a pardon from President Al-Sisi, who had personally spoken out against the case (Smail, 2014). On September 23, 2015 Fahmy and Mohamed, along with over hundred political prisoners, were pardoned and released from jail the day before Al Sisi headed to the seventieth annual UN summit of world leaders in New York (*BBC*, 2015c). In a *BBC* (2015c) *HARD* talk interview after the pardon, Fahmy confirmed that he was suing *Al Jazeera* for damages in failing to safeguard his journalism practices while in Egypt. On September 30, 2015 the deported Greste formally asked President Al Sisi for a pardon, but at the time of writing this paper that pardon is yet to come (Vincent, 2015).

#### **IV. Research Methods**

A twenty-one months mixed methods content analysis of the *AJE*, *BBC* and *ABC* coverage of this case was conducted from December 29, 2013 (the date of the *AJE* journalists' arrest) until September 30, 2015 (a week after Fahmy and Mohamed's final release from jail) to assess if items on the UNESCO safety of journalists' agenda were covered in the reportage. Firstly, quantitative content analysis was completed because it offered "objective, systematic, decoding" of stories, which is helpful when detecting "media biases and media performance" (Kolmer, 2008, p.117). Then, qualitative quotes were extracted from the content analysis and used in the overall data analysis if they expanded on a coded finding.

##### *A. Why analyze Al Jazeera, the BBC and the ABC?*

The content analysis focused on the three broadcasters' news, feature, and opinion reportage of this *AJE* case for three reasons. Firstly, Greste, the Western journalist at the media spotlight of this case, also worked at all three broadcasters, and it would be insightful to see how the broadcasters, past and present, reported on this controversial case. Secondly, the broadcasters were seen as examples of libertarian and social responsibly press, and in principle should offer an interpretation of press freedom aligned with addressing safety of their journalists. Thirdly, in 2013, the *BBC* developed a Journalism Safety Application for the iPhone which allowed its staff access to global safety information and guidance. Given this background, it would also be insightful to examine how *AJE*, the *BBC* and the *ABC* reported on the *AJE* case where the safety of journalists was a critical issue.

##### *B. Coding and Stages of Analysis*

News, feature and opinion stories (across multimedia, radio and television) from *AJE*, the *BBC* and *ABC* during the allotted period were coded by date, program type (news, current affairs, investigative, opinion, features) and format (radio or television report, online or

multimedia article). The angle of each story was the central framing for the content analysis and each angle was assessed if it referred to the ten items on the UNESCO's Safety of Journalists' agenda. A total of 495 stories from *AJE*, the *BBC* and the *ABC* were analyzed in two stages. Stage One (Arrest to Initial Trial) from December 29 to June 30, 2014 analyzed the first seven months reportage, which consisted of 294 articles (116 *AJE* stories, 113 *ABC* stories, 65 *BBC* stories) and accounted for 59 % of all the stories analyzed. Stage Two (Imprisonment, Deportation, Retrial and Pardon) from July 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015 analyzed the last fourteen month reportage, which consisted of 201 articles (85 *AJE* stories; 61 *ABC* stories, 55 *BBC* stories) and accounted for 41% of all the stories.

## **V. Analysis**

Over the twenty-one month period, forty-one percent of the stories came from *AJE*, thirty-five percent from the *ABC*, and twenty-four percent from the *BBC*. The majority of the *AJE* stories (seventy per cent) and *BBC* (eighty percent) were multimedia reports, while the dominant format (sixty percent) of the *ABC* reporting was radio, mainly from its flagship radio current affairs programs such as *ABC Radio's* AM and PM. Proportionately, *Al Jazeera English* reported the most about the safety of the *AJE* trio, followed by the *BBC*, and then the *ABC*.

### *A. Stage One: Arrest to Initial Trial*

The safety of journalists during the first seven months reportage was covertly examined by *AJE*, then by the *BBC*, but rarely covered by the *ABC*. In contrast, the *ABC* focused on the effect of the imprisonment on Greste's family perhaps because this discourse had more mass audience appeal than a discussion about journalists' safety. The *AJE* and the *BBC* discussions about safety were cloaked around the first two Egyptian charges against the *AJE* trio, namely that they were (i) broadcasting, and (ii) and using technical devices without a license (*ABC*, 2014a). The *BBC* coverage questioned these charges diplomatically from a

press freedom angle, whereas *AJE* challenged and condemned the charges from a defensive angle. For example, on February 20, 2014 (a), the *BBC* reported that the Egyptian authorities said the *AJE* trio's detention was not an "attack on freedom of speech," "*Al Jazeera* journalists were working illegally because they did not have press passes" and "broke the law."

Since 2013, the *Al Jazeera* coverage made no apology for sending the trio to Egypt to report on the regime. Al Anstey, the managing director of *AJE* at the time, said that the claims of broadcasting illegally were "arbitrary." "We operate in Egypt legally" (*Al Jazeera*, 2013). Then, on February 5, 2014 on the *BBC*'s *News Night* program, Salah Negm, *AJE*'s Director of News, was unclear about *AJE* accreditation in Cairo. "Non-accreditation is a simple administrative charge and it does not result in imprisoning journalists or referring them to criminal court," Negm said. On June 26, 2014, a few days after the initial long term sentencing, *Al Jazeera* network reported that Robert Mahony from CPJ said there were about "1200 foreign correspondents in Egypt and none of them are being harassed or annoyed" thereby indicating how murky this case was.

Tied to a media management approach, it seemed difficult for the three broadcasters to know where to put the emphasis on during the first seven months reportage on the *AJE* case in Egypt. In their "public relations campaign to influence the news agenda," *AJE* and the *BBC* chose the technical, legal issues related to accreditation and licensing, but this was not spelt out as the safety of journalists (Curran, 2002, p. 128). In contrast, the *ABC* pulled on the heart strings of audiences and chose the emotional angle, the family discourse (Curran, 2002, pp.128, 150). However, by failing to offer a concrete discussion about the charges against the *AJE* trio, linked to the safety of journalists, the three broadcasters were contradicting the libertarian and social responsibility philosophy where the press aims to report on issues without bias (Siebert et al., 1956). True objectivity may be elusive because

it is “a product of organisational processes and human interaction” (Curran, 2002, p. 128), but the broadcasters were (perhaps) enhancing an authoritarian controlled view of their media message and actively produced a propagandist bias consensus in society (Siebert et al., 1956). For example, *Al Jazeera*'s oppositional reportage to Egyptian charges about the networks' non accreditation and licensing practices in that country reflect that the network was also restricting freedom of speech in Egypt, and (perhaps) working under the guise of radical functionalism, as described by James Curran (2002).

### *B. Stage Two: Imprisonment, Deportation, Retrial and Pardon*

In the stage two analyses, the last fourteen months of the case, the *AJE* coverage began exploring the safety of journalists' issue, but still from a defensive angle. The *ABC* centered on the legal issues and Fahmy law suit against *Al Jazeera*, while the *BBC* examined why the Egyptian regime was controlling its media. In an *Al Jazeera* Question and Answer format posted on its website between 1 July 2014 and 30 September 2015, the key question remained, “Did *Al Jazeera* uphold its responsibility to its staff located in Egypt?” The network claimed it did, several times. [Question] “Was it negligent that your journalists did not have accreditation from the Egyptian authorities? [Answer from *Al Jazeera*] We've never made any secret that the crew did not have their full individual paperwork ... In countries that require accreditation; it's an administrative matter, not a criminal one. [Question] Why did you put *AJE* reports on *Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr* (AJMM) when Fahmy asked you not to? [Answer from *Al Jazeera*] AJMM used footage from a variety of sources, including international news agencies and citizen journalists (*Al Jazeera*, 2015e).

In a change of tone, *Al Jazeera* was the only broadcaster out of the three to report (in some depth) on the first UN International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists which was held on November 1, 2014. The network also helped to arrange the Safety of Journalists Symposium where Gianfranco Fattorini, a representative to the UN of

the Press Emblem Campaign, noted that it was necessary to create an independent, international organisation to challenge impunity against journalists (*Al Jazeera*, 2014c). Despite *Al Jazeera* network's latent growing awareness about the safety of its staff, Fahmy overtly criticized how the network failed to protect the *AJE* trio in Cairo. As noted, in May 2015 he began the process to sue *Al Jazeera* network for its role in his Egyptian conviction. Fahmy's legal case against *Al Jazeera* received a lot of coverage by the *ABC* but minimal reportage on *AJE* and the *BBC*. For instance, Fahmy told Alison Caldwell from the *ABC* on May 12, 2015 that "The prosecutor presented documents proving that *Al Jazeera* did not have the proper transmission and broadcast licenses, which is unacceptable." Caldwell then advised Fahmy that "*Al Jazeera* released an official statement saying that this is exactly what your captors want to hear at this stage of the retrial." Fahmy replied, "*Al Jazeera*'s statement is unacceptable. There has to be a separation between the network's responsibilities and the journalist's responsibilities" (Caldwell, 2015). Fahmy's action and comments to the *ABC* lie at the heart of UNESCO's agenda and the legal tools needed to protect journalists (Pöyhtäri & Berger, 2015, pp. 2-5).

Unlike *AJE* and the *BBC*, the *ABC* also reported on other legal issues, such as the development of a Universal Charter of Media Freedom, an idea that Greste, Fahmy and Mohamed worked on during their Egyptian imprisonment. However, the retrial of the *AJE* trio from February 23, 2015 received minimal coverage on the *ABC* after Greste was deported back to Australia on February 5, 2015. Then, when the Egyptian court demanded that the deported Greste appear in person at the retrial in May 2015, the *ABC* stepped up its coverage. As Greste told Sabra Lane (2015) on the *ABC* TV's *7.30 Report*, "It is legal ambiguity." In contrast to the *ABE* and *AJE*, in the last fourteen months of *AJE* case, the *BBC* coverage focused on Egypt's befuddled view of press freedom, emphasizing that the country was going through one of the greatest crises of its turbulent history. The *BBC*

described the Egyptian situation as a catastrophe, on a moral, human, and political scale (Iqbal, 2015).

### *C. Statutory, Independent, Media Council to Address the Safety of Journalists*

In early September 2015, once the dust was settled regarding the *AJE* case in Greste's adopted home of Nairobi, a one-day roundtable about the safety of journalists was organised by the International Press Institute (IPI) in cooperation with the Africa Media Initiative and *Al Jazeera's* Center for Public Liberties and Human Rights (Free Media, 2015). Introducing the roundtable, Daoud Kuttab from the IPI said that in the safety of journalists debate, there were three groups of stakeholders: "(i) journalists who should be aware that no story is worth their lives; (ii) media organisations which should never send journalists on assignments if they are not entirely sure they are prepared for them; (iii) state institutions which should end impunity in crimes against journalists" (Free Media, 2015). However, these three key issues were rarely reported on by *AJE*, the *BBC* and the *ABC* during the Egyptian trial of the *AJE* trio. The Nairobi roundtable agreed that the Kenyan example, where civil society groups and media organisations worked together to develop a statutory, independent, media council to create safety mechanisms for journalists, would address impunity against journalists in Africa, in particular, Egypt and the journalism profession as a whole (Free Media, 2015).

## **VI. Conclusion**

The case of the imprisoned *Al Jazeera* English journalists (Greste, Fahmy and Mohamed), their trial and retrial between 2013 and 2015, highlighted the ten key items (the right-based, conflict, societal, legal, practitioner, psychological, economic, digital, thematic and educational issues) on the UNESCO agenda in relation to the safety of journalists (Pöyhtäri & Berger, 2015, pp. 2-5). However, none of these items were overtly spelt out, or addressed in detail, in the twenty one months' coverage of the case by *AJE*, the *BBC* and the

*ABC*. In the Stage One analysis, the seven months from the time of arrest (29 December 2013) leading up to the first trial and initial sentencing on June 24, 2014(b), coverage about the *AJE* trio's safety on the ground in Cairo was kept to a minimum by *AJE* and the *BBC* and cloaked as accreditation and licensing issues of practicing journalism in Egypt. In contrast, the *ABC* reportage focused on the family discourse, that is, the effect of Greste's long term imprisonment on his family. During the Stage Two's analysis, the fourteen months from July 1, 2014 leading up to the final verdict, until a week after the pardon (30 September 2015), the safety of the *AJE* trio was more overtly acknowledged by the three broadcasters, but still marginally cloaked under the demise of press freedom. In this final stage of reportage, *Al Jazeera* remained defensive about the safety of its staff in Cairo but helped to organize a symposium about the wider issues about reporting in politically unstable countries. The *ABC* centered on the legal issues and Fahmy's lawsuit against *Al Jazeera* while the *BBC* examined why the Egyptian regime was controlling its media. However, the latent awareness of the three broadcasters to debunk issues related to the safety of the *AJE* in Cairo across the stage one and two analyses reflected that they failed to abide by their press philosophy of libertarian and social responsibly journalism (Siebert et al., 1956). Hopefully, future cases about journalists' safety in Egypt, the African region, and globally, will examine (in some depth) the ten items noted in the UNESCO's Safety of Journalists agenda. Addressing this research gap will help keep the conversation open about the safety of journalists as they continue their work as members of the fourth estate.

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