

***FULL SIGNAL* Sends a Signal**

Chellis Glendinning

On December 2, the world premiere of Palestinian/American Talal Jabari's documentary on the dangers of wireless technologies, [*Full Signal*](#), took New Mexico's [Santa Fe Film Festival](#) by storm.

The cinematic turbulence occurred just four weeks after a straggle of the "usual suspects" attended a public works committee meeting in Santa Fe's city hall to stop councilors from endorsing a rewrite of the telecommunications-franchise ordinance. A new ordinance is being pushed to limit the city's choices about if and where to allow new telecom installations.

The usual suspects in this case are the folks from the Santa Fe Alliance for Public Health and Safety who always show up: those whose reactions to electromagnetic radiation (EMF) from antennas; cordless, internet, and cell phones; WiFi hot spots, etc. erupt in its presence as headaches, anxiety, muscle aches, flu symptoms, cognitive confusion, and visual abnormalities. Some of them have been working to stop the industry's roll-out of EMF-emitting technologies ever since the [U.S. Telecommunications Act of 1996](#) deregulated the industry.

At the committee meeting, the members of the alliance were not allowed to speak.

The premiere was something decidedly different for the municipality that calls itself The City Different. *It was a stampede.* Every seat was filled. Bucking fire regulations, festival staff squeezed in extra chairs along the aisles and in the wheelchair wells. The city attorney and one councilor showed up, and would-be movie-goers clamoring in the lobby were turned away. On December 3 the public crashed a private showing for government officials and the media, and the following day a presentation of the film was thrown together for New Mexico Department of Health officials. Then on December 6, in the final hour, the festival agreed to a second showing to slake the demand.

What happened between early November and December 2 could be a manifestation of the old saw popular in the anti-nuclear movement of the 1980s: water looks just like water up until the moment it freezes.

Ever since TA96 opened the way for wholesale industry proliferation a la World-Trade-Organization market supremacy, a handful of scientists, academicians, legal experts, and activists has been attempting to catalyze public outcry against what some describe as genocide, others suicide: the blasting of dangerous non-ionizing radiation across a living planet via satellites, cell towers, military installations, wireless antennas, and all the consumer gadgets that hoodwink ordinary people into believing that EMF-emitting technologies are normal.

But, for almost two decades, that handful has been hard-pressed to grow beyond itself.

Full Signal presents one hour of startling facts, mind-twisting visuals, and wrenching emotional vignettes. Former CBS news associate producer, *60 Minutes* field producer, and Al Jazeera documentary-channel producer, Jabari is no stranger to hot spots; he has worked in Israel, Nigeria, Guatemala, and Serbia. To make *Full Signal* he visited 18 experts in ten countries and six U.S. states.

The result of his efforts: the suspected health effects of EMFs are validated through biological studies, medical research, epidemiologically-documented real-life situations, and individual's lives.

Here are images of rats' brains before exposure to cell-phone radiation (whole and healthy) and after (riddled with holes). There, laboratory research on the deterioration of the blood-brain barrier during a two-minute phone call. Here, pictures of irreparable rips in DNA. There evidence of neurological, coronary, and immunological diseases whose increases in incidence parallel the spread of EMR-emitting technologies.

Here is Swedish author Rigmor Grandlund-Lind, a hostage in her small apartment where metal screens line the walls so that she may live a little while longer in a city completely overtaken by cell towers and wireless antennas.

There, a map of the Arab village of Issifya in Israel showing the location of some 70 antennas hidden behind trees and under the eaves of private homes – with a second map overlaying it revealing the town's cancer clusters *precisely* around each antenna. And here is school teacher Samira Azzam holding back tears because she is one who contracted cancer.

Jabari describes his film as an examination of “the contradiction between health and finance,” and herein lies the tangle for concerned citizens.

According to [Bharat Book Bureau's Electronic Reports](#), the telecommunications industry raked in \$1.7 trillion in 2008 and is slated to make \$2.7 trillion by 2013. Read: it is one of the biggest businesses on the planet. Since the mid-1990s, the industry has managed to infiltrate every sector of global society, making its technologies indispensable to human functioning.

As Foundation for Deep Ecology program director Jerry Mander put it in 1994, the reach of the corporate economy would not exist without the instantaneous control that supercomputers and satellite/wireless communications make possible. While such gigantic technologies underlie the day-to-day operation of today's mega-economy, continuous dissemination of their gadgetry to the captivated consumer provides its day-to-day inflow of capital: [an estimated 4 billion people](#) in the world are cell phone subscribers.

Jabari explores the legal side of the telecom industry's global command by highlighting struggles to stop the proliferation of antennas. New York City Council member Peter Vallone Jr. has introduced several pieces of legislation to stop unchecked placement of antennas in neighborhoods and inform citizens of the location of sources of EMFs – without success. Standing on a street corner in the city, he explains that TA96 bars the public from protesting on the basis of health concerns. When crafting federal legislation, industry lobbyists made sure that they would not repeat the lack of foresight of the nuclear industry that has recently been slammed with lawsuits from dying down-winders, lab workers, and uranium miners.

Community activists going up against telecoms must revert to indirect ploys like errors in the permit process and the rights of migratory birds. A Park Slope coop building in Brooklyn successfully cornered T-Mobile into breaking a signed contract by uncovering their dishonesty about the size of the antenna in question.

Then there's the cancer-ridden Arab village in Israel whose citizens had exhausted all legal recourse – so they climbed onto the roof and tore an antenna down with their hands.

Throughout the film MRI images, interviews, charts, and animation are interspersed with visual montages of 150-foot towers, antennas in all their shapes and forms, antennas disguised as trees, and people everywhere talking on cell phones. Then more towers, more antennas, more “trees,” more people on phones – until the psychological defense that spurs one to see these technologies as normal, or not to see them at all, is cracked open: the viewer will never again *not* see them.

After the last showing in Santa Fe, the audience lingered, turning the theater into a community meeting to plan for the upcoming public works committee session, which coincidentally was scheduled for the next night.

The usual suspects braved a snowstorm to get to [that meeting](#) where, to their surprise, they found it packed with a new crop of citizens, educated and energized by *Full Signal*. Twenty-one spoke -- mothers, physicists, doctors, the electro-sensitive, teachers -- airing outrage that the federal government had usurped their right to a safe environment.

Then, displaying unexpected openness, Councilor Patti Bushee thanked the usual suspects for keeping at them all these years. Councilor Miguel Chavez vowed to cut down on his cell phone use. Councilor Rosemary Romero offered to sponsor a city resolution for Santa Fe to join Portland OR, Los Angeles County, Sebastopol CA, Albany CA, Pima AZ County, and Glendale CA in challenging the section of TA96 that forbids local decision-making based on health concerns.

Then Bushee said, “...and now the vote nobody wants”: the telecom-franchise ordinance rewrite. Despite sentiment to the contrary, all public works committee members bowed to federal dictate, voting to recommend the new ordinance to the full council.

Except one – Miguel Chavez. He is now preparing to run for mayor.

Outside, the snow was freezing on the ground. In the city hall chambers, in one month's time, a signal had been received.

Chellis Glendinning is a psychotherapist and the author of five books, including *When Technology Wounds: The Human Consequences of Progress* (1990) and *Off the Map: An Expedition Deep into Empire and the Global Economy* (1999).