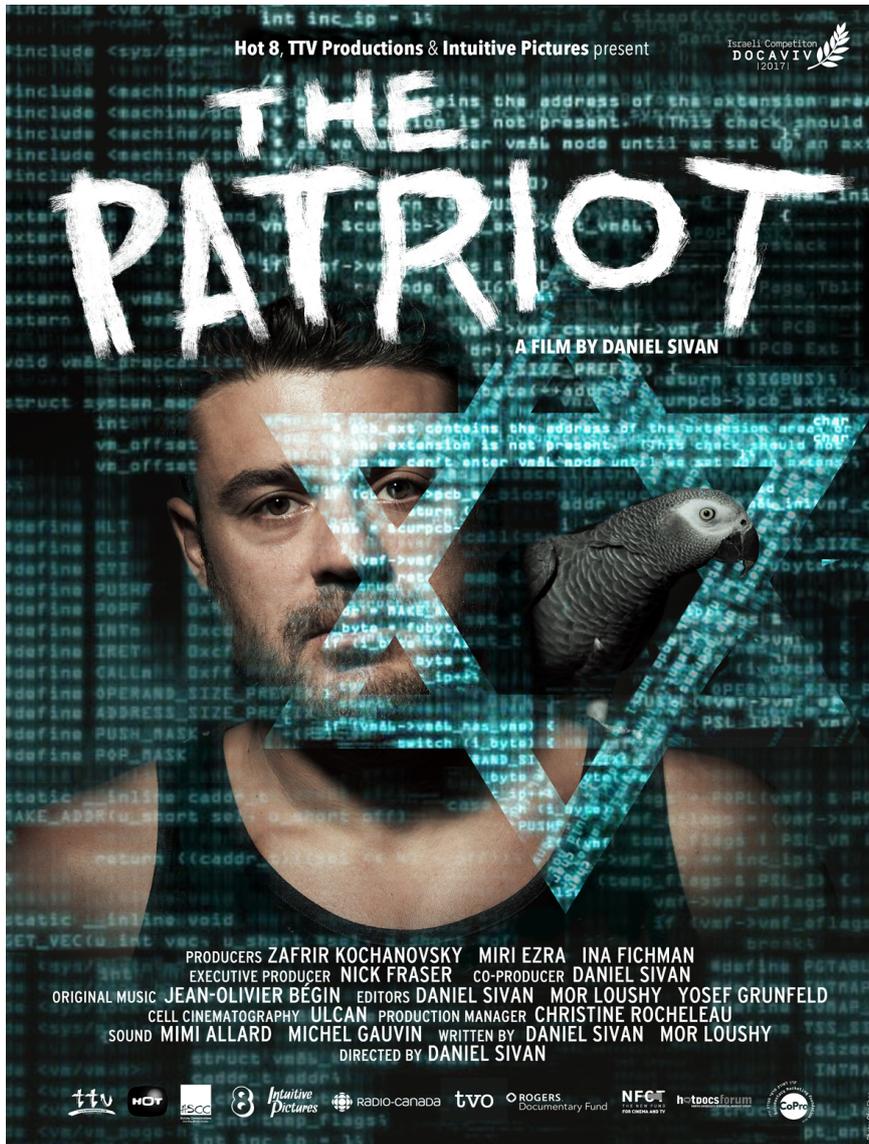


THE PATRIOT

A Film By Daniel Sivan

("Censored Voices", "Monkey Business", "The Go Go Boys")



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SYNOPSIS

In recent years Anti-Semitism in France has been on the rise. Charismatic leaders such as Dieudonne (inventor of the quenelle) and Alan Soral (a journalist and writer who became a far-right ideologue) are no longer hiding in the shadows but displaying their agenda in public. Tension is felt on the streets of Paris, but the real battlefield is online, where hatred has no limits or censorship.

This reality has given birth to a new kind of vigilante: a militant-Zionist hacker by the name of "Ulcan", who declares a one-man-war against the leaders of the Anti-Semitic movement... **The Patriot** is a tale of extremism and vengeance in the Cyber Age.

Official Competition Docaviv International Film Festival Israel, 2017

CAST & CREW

Director: Daniel Sivan
Producer: Zafrir Kochanovsky, Miri Ezra, Ina Fichman
Executive Producer: Nick Fraser
Produced with the help of: The New Fund for Cinema and Television
Broadcaster: Hot 8, Radio Canada, TVO,
Screenplay: Daniel Sivan, Mor Loushy
Cinematographer: Cell Phone Cinematography: Ulcan,
Additional Footage: Daniel Sivan
Editor: Daniel Sivan, Mor Loushy, Yosef Grunfeld
Sound Designer: Mimi Allard, Michel Gauvin

SPECIFICATIONS

Shooting Format: HD
Language: French (with English subtitles)
Frame Aspect Ratio: 24/25
Sound: 5.1 Dolby
Running Time: 73 minutes
Country: Israel, Canada

HAARETZ

The French Hacker Who Took His 'Hack Back' Against Anti-Semites Too Far

Gregory Chelli, known by the nickname Ulcan, worked to undermine the online efforts of notorious anti-Jewish activists but his actions seemed to have crossed a line. Now France wants him extradited from Israel

By Gili Izikovich
May 21, 2017



Gregory Chelli, known by the nickname "Ulcan," at home in Ashdod, May 2017. Credit: Ilan Assayag

If you didn't know anything about Gregory Chelli, you'd be amazed to hear that this smiley young man is at the heart of a dispute between France and Israel, which is refusing to extradite him, despite serious pressure and even a special visit here by the French foreign minister.

Nothing in his apartment in the new high-rise overlooking the Ashdod beach might lead one to think that the tenant is facing 50 pending criminal charges and an official extradition request. Chelli, 34, also doesn't come off personally as an arch-criminal, even of the newfangled type – of the cyber world. At first it's also hard to imagine the extent of the damage he is capable of causing, or the conflicting feelings that his tale arouses.

Chelli, known by the nickname Ulcan, is the subject of a new documentary film, "The Patriot," now in competition in the DocAviv Festival and soon to be shown on HOT's Channel 8, which helped finance the production. Although the movie is in French,

centers on a Frenchman and deals with French current events, as of now, the film will not be aired in France. More on that below.

Chelli's story, as depicted in this intricate film, is full of contradictions: It's one that boosts the Jewish and Israeli ego and stirs healthy national pride and proceeds to hurl all this crashing hard into the ground of reality. This is because Gregory Chelli is a multilayered character, inspiring proud laughter one moment and flabbergasted revulsion the next.

He was born and raised in a comfortable middle-class Parisian suburb. His mother worked in retail and his father was in advertising. Both now live in Israel, not far from him. He says his family never identified much with religion and that none of them, including him, ever felt any special Zionist inclinations.

He also says that he never suffered any anti-Semitic harassment, though his younger brother did. Nonetheless, sometime in his early twenties, about a decade ago, Chelli became active in the Jewish Defense League. At the time, the views of people like Alain Soral (a journalist and writer who became a far-right ideologue spouting anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist comments), Kémi Séba (founder of the French movement dedicated to defending the black race and known for virulently anti-Semitic rhetoric) and Thomas Werlet (a neo-Nazi-aligned politician), among others, were gaining an increasingly warm welcome in France.



Controversial French comic Dieudonné M'Elba M'Elba, answers reporters ahead of European elections, Paris, France, May 13, 2009.
AP Photo/Remy de la Mauviniere

Above all, there was the surging popularity of French comedian Dieudonné M'Elba M'Elba, inventor of the *quenelle* – the inverted Nazi salute. “It used to be, years ago, that anti-Semitism was confined to the old-style extreme-rightists whom no one thought of as a sane group. But for some years now, anti-Semitism

has become fashionable, with different, newer explanations given for it,” Chelli explains.

“In 2008, I saw Dieudonné and the change in him. He was very sophisticated. Everyone whose ideology included a Jew-hating side identified with Dieudonné and expressed support, even if they came from opposite sides of the barricade. He brought together leftist Kémi Séba and neo-Nazis Alain Soral and Thomas Werlet. During that period a coalition of shady characters began to gather around Dieudonné, who were linked only by Jew hatred.”

A man performs a "quenelle" salute after the performance of French controversial humorist Dieudonne M'bala M'bala was cancelled on January 9, 2014. AFP

Chelli's interest in computers and programming began when he was 7 years old, and by the time he was an adolescent, he was trying to learn how to hack into websites. At the same time he began to draw up a list of anti-Semitic activists and became a registered member of the Jewish Defense League, but it took him a few more years to put the first at the service of the second. Meanwhile, he says, he committed more traditional criminal offenses. He received an 18-month suspended sentence, for example, after setting Werlet's motorcycle on fire, and he serenely describes acts of vandalism against the pro-Palestinian Jewish organization Europalestine. ("They're crazy. They call IDF soldiers SS.")



Those are serious crimes: setting fire to someone's vehicle, destroying a political organization's library.

"Jews who pressure a supermarket chain to remove Israeli merchandise from the shelves, that's crazy. I felt that I had to do something, and I did a lot together with the Jewish Defense League. Werlet is a terrible person with horrible opinions, a neo-Nazi whose statements filtered down and caused other people to identify. That's dangerous. Dieudonne and Alain, on their own, brought about a change in public opinion in France, they separated 'Zionist' from 'Jewish.' They claim that they have no problem with Jews, but that Zionism is a disease. Slowly but surely the boundaries between this distinction began to erode."

Sweet revenge

"The Patriot," the film by director Daniel Sivan, brings the situation described by Chelli to the screen. Spectacles in huge auditoriums at which thousands perform the quenelle, dance to a rhythmic song that combines the words "Shoah" and "ananas" (pineapple, in French) into "Shoananas"; lectures in which politicians explain from the dias of the Parliament what the Talmud ostensibly instructs Jews to do to non-Jews; and widely viewed clips on YouTube with horrifying words and pictures that are even worse.

It took a few years for Chelli to find his unique path, with a formative activity. One morning, seething with fury, he entered Dieudonne's official website and, in a "very simple" operation, revealed the names of the anti-Semitic comedian's supporters. All those who made donations to him, those who were photographed performing the quenelle – amounting to some 10,000 names, which he then sent to France's principal media outlets, which published his list.



"The Patriot" director Daniel Sivan.

"It was more elegant and more effective, and I realized that it was a far better method of operation and that I should concentrate my efforts in that direction," he says. And the film, at least at the beginning, entertains viewers with the hacker's sweet revenge. For example, he calls the police and confesses to terrible crimes supposedly committed by the same anti-Semite, while summoning large numbers of policemen to his home, over and over.

He brings down websites, exposes criminal or unacceptable behavior (he caught Soral sending nude pictures of himself to a "17-year-old fan") and posts them publicly. Even those photographed performing the quennelle are not exempt. Their relatives receive phone calls, ostensibly from the police or the emergency services, who inform them of the death of their loved ones from consumption of rotten pineapple.

That last stunt marks the point where Jewish pride encounters a sense of unease for the first time. It turns into real disgust when Chelli's practical jokes turn into abuse. How is an anti-Semite's elderly, blind mother-in-law to blame for her son-in-law's behavior, for example? And why does Chelli laugh with such sadistic pleasure?



A still of Gregory Chelli on his computer from "The Patriot." Credit: Daniel Sivan

From activist to hooligan

It happens mainly surrounding the events of Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in 2014. Chelli has already immigrated to Israel and experienced a missile attack in

Ashdod, but since he doesn't speak Hebrew at the time, he continues to get his news in French. He makes efforts to attack pro-Palestinian websites, but "I realized that they were not the problem. The problem is with the major media outlets that cover Israel in a biased, unrepresentative manner, without being familiar with the country and what's happening here.

"The Israeli reality is not something that exists in the French media. French people believe that Israel systematically castrates dark-skinned people, you can search for that on the Internet, it's entirely out in the open. To what extent are we supposed to accept that? I wanted to plant messages on certain websites."

You know, there's something about your activities that at first arouses pride and afterward makes one unwilling to identify with you, due to your criminal behavior. That moment with the blind mother of Soral's wife is a terrible moment.

"That's the worst thing I've done, but it's one thing in eight or 10 years of activity. Anyone who does nothing won't do bad things either. But I wanted to find out information about Alain Soral, and in the end that's what was important. Thanks to the things I did he lost credibility and support, he lost the righteous halo that surrounded him. It's true that it's an ugly thing to cause distress to his wife's old and blind mother, but I wouldn't have done it if he hadn't suggested loading Jews onto trains. That's the ugliest and worst thing I've done."

But there were also other things, and in the spiral described by the film, Chelli looks like someone who was taken over by "Ulcan" (he says that the name is one he originally took for himself in a popular computer game), or to put it bluntly, like someone on an ego trip, a thuggish megalomania. He threatens the leader of a BDS-supporting Jewish leftist movement, and at the height of the film he also threatens journalist Benoit Le Corre, who had published an unflattering article about him. After contacting Le Corre's parents and informing them that their son had died in an accident, he summons the police to their home in the Paris suburbs in the middle of the night. Five days later, Le Corre's father suffers a heart attack. He dies a short time later.

Thierry Le Corre's death in 2014 led to a sharp change in the attitude of the authorities toward Chelli's activities. After years of turning a blind eye, they began to investigate him. He was accused of deliberate violence that caused death, and an international warrant was issued for his arrest.



You didn't like Le Corre's article about you, so you exploited the means at your disposal to make his life and that of his parents miserable? Why are they to blame?

A still of Gregory Chelli on his computer from "The Patriot."

“He published lies about me and I asked him to correct them. He knows how I operate and he contacted his parents and warned them. If you listen carefully to the conversation with his mother,” he says – Chelli immediately searches for it on one of the two laptops on the table – “you can understand from the tone of her voice and from what she says that she knows who’s talking to her. Le Corre turned the run-in with me into the reason for his father’s death, but his father suffered a heart attack five days after the conversation with me.”

I had a feeling that at some point along the way your initial targets, those who had clear, anti-Semitic objectives, were replaced by people whom you simply disliked, or who said or wrote things about you that you didn’t like. You became a hooligan instead of an activist.

“I realize that I may have gone too far with Benoit Le Corre, but he himself behaved thuggishly toward me. If my mother had read his article and suffered a heart attack because they wrote there that her son is a racist militant, would anyone have accused him of violence that caused death? Had I called his father and caused him to suffer a heart attack on the spot, I would have extradited myself to France and confessed my sins, but that’s not what happened.

“I agree that there’s a difference between my behavior toward anti-Semites and what I did to Le Corre, but the French media plays a big role in anti-Semitism and its dissemination in public opinion. I couldn’t help but react, because he damaged my credibility, but I didn’t want to harm people’s lives. Today, I don’t do those things anymore. I’m afraid of an unanticipated reaction. I no longer call the police, because I’m afraid that a bullet could be discharged and hit someone, and for the past three years, I have not hacked anti-Israeli websites.”

Maybe along the way you fell in love with the power you amassed?

“Yes, but I don’t think that I misused the power I might have had. Over the past three years I haven’t done anything, and if I wanted to I could have continued to act and not identified myself, even hidden myself. I really enjoyed what I did, it’s true.”

And I had a feeling that you enjoy it a little too much, that you sometimes derived sadistic pleasure at other people’s suffering.

“There’s enjoyment and there’s justice in the suffering and crying of people who are convinced that they are strong and permit themselves to tell lies and to promote them. I contacted the mothers of people who laughed at the fate of our grandmothers. If they’re allowed to do it, so am I, and after I did it they stopped. Did I enjoy it? Yes, I did. But I wouldn’t do such a thing to someone who didn’t start first. It’s true that the mothers themselves didn’t do those things, but all I did was a phone prank. It’s not a nice thing to do, but that’s what it is.”

Why not turn to the police? There’s a glorious justice system in France, why not work by legal means?

“When I went to court after setting Werlet’s motorcycle on fire, the judge said to me, ‘He’s a neo-Nazi, you’re a Zionist, everyone is allowed his political opinions.’ That’s crazy. I told the judge that I was really sorry, but my ideology doesn’t include the systematic murder of innocents and doing horrifying experiments on human beings, so how can you compare? Nobody respects the Jews when they complain through the accepted channels. The police force doesn’t work, and therefore I took it upon myself to be the police force of the Internet.”

I’m still not sure that I understand why a secular guy, not identified religiously, not a Zionist, who attests that he never suffered from anti-Semitism, would engage in such activity.

“I think that if anti-black racism were to arise in France, I would do the same thing. I’ve never been able to stay on the sidelines, I’ve always had an activist nature. When I was 3 or 4, in nursery school, I saw children bigger than me, 5 or 6 years old, hitting a young child my age. I remember that I took sand and threw it into their eyes. As long as I can remember myself, I was like that. There’s a lot of anti-Semitism in France even today, and it’s dangerous in light of the strengthening of Islam, but in general, as far as I can see, the situation is better than it was a few years ago. Today, there’s already a serious new enemy. The overall atmosphere is less anti-Semitic.”

'Anti-Semitic characteristics'

“The Patriot” won’t be screened in France “due to anti-Semitic characteristics.” The efforts of film director Daniel Sivan (whose earlier films included “November 08,” about the army service of a group of friends; the series “Silicon Wadi,” and the film “Censored Voices,” about the Six-Day War, which he made with his partner director Mor Loushy) and producer Zafir Kochanovsky to produce the film in partnership with a local European broadcasting company, as is customary, were rejected with a creative excuse – they had no desire, nor were they permitted, to show anti-Semitic symbols on local television. “We were in several broadcasting companies in France and Germany and received a similar response. They told us that it’s forbidden to show swastikas and quenelle salutes, and that if they bought the film they would censor it,” says Sivan.

“I don’t pretend to having expertise in all the films backed by these companies, but a lot of the money goes to finance films that are critical of injustices the world over. They’re happy to pay for films with penetrating criticism of the Israeli occupation, for example, but they aren’t willing to see what’s happening in their own home,” he says.

Sivan says that at first he was sure they would reject “The Patriot” for entirely different reasons, such as a sense that the subject is overworked, but he discovered that the European camel can’t see its own hump. “Every European film festival will have lots of films with European funding, about injustices everywhere in the world, and almost no films about European colonialism and how it affects internal problems today. I haven’t found the European Michael Moore, and when I looked for movies that were critical of what is happening in France, I didn’t find any.

“The fact is that no documentary films have been made about Charlie Hebdo or the Islamic State attacks in France, attempting to understand how those forces grew there. I didn’t find a single note of criticism. Dieudonne is one of the most fascinating cultural phenomena in the world. I was sure they would say to me ‘Another film about Dieudonne?’ But although he’s a phenomenon, although he’s so popular and became famous thanks to radical political humor, not a single documentary has been made about him. The French aren’t eager to turn the camera on themselves.”

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.790649>

Directors Statement:

The Patriot is not "a nice film". The characters are not nice, their actions are disturbing (to say the least) and the ending does not leave you with a nice fuzzy feeling of catharsis, as the hero has not bettered his ways. This is due to a simple fact – our reality is not nice. **The Patriot** is a fly on the wall of YouTube, giving us a dark and disturbing glance into a world of racism, extremism and violence that is hidden in plain sight. My choice to chronicle this disturbing story without any interruption or interpretation was due to the fact I wished to force the audience to make up their own mind on the world we live in. You, as the audience, are forced to look at the anti-Semitic leaders, at Ulcan's vicious vendetta and to acknowledge the fact this is our world. I believe there are no good sides, no winners in this story – just a circle of violence we must find a way of breaking. **The Patriot** is probably the most controversial film I ever made, as it refuses to live within the world of Political Correctness, but sadly the characters I followed don't even know the meaning of the word...

Director's Biography & Filmography:

Daniel Sivan is an Israeli award-winning Director/Producer known for his critical social-political documentaries. His works include 'Censored Voices' (producer/writer), winner of the Israeli Oscars, screened at Sundance & the Berlinale and theatrically released worldwide; 'Offside' (director) screened at IDFA, Tribeca and Toronto; 'Monkey Business' (director) Winner of Haifa Film Festival; 'The Go-Go Boys' (writer/editor) screened at Cannes Film Festival; 'Israel LTD.' (producer/writer) Screened at IDFA; He recently edited "Death in the Terminal" (Executive produced by Megan Ellison) – Winner of Israeli Oscars 2016 and IDFA Mid-Length competition.

