**The Bondarchuk Dynasty: Two Generations of Imperial(ist) State-Sponsored Celebrities**

Alexander Prokhorov and Elena Prokhorova

“Iabloko ot iabloni nedaleko padaet.”

(The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.)

International idiom

In 2003, almost ten years after Sergei Bondarchuk’s death, his colleagues and family commemorated the filmmaker with a volume titled *Sergei Bondarchuk v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov* (*Sergei Bondarchuk as Remembered by His Contemporaries*). The traditional Soviet-style title signaled continuity between Putin’s rule and the Soviet era—the time when Bondarchuk and his clan were the epitome of the Soviet film establishment. Notably, the volume appeared not right after the director’s death in 1994, but in the early years of Putin’s tenure. Many of the entries, as well as the introduction, marked this book as a *ressentiment* reaction to the Gorbachev and Yeltsin years—the time of liberal reforms in politics, economics, and, of course, culture. Various contributors used their reminiscences of Bondarchuk only as a chance to revise the accomplishments of the years of reforms. The first entry is by Iurii Bondarev, a Soviet writer who made his career writing about WWII and who after the fall of the USSR became a nationalist public intellectual. In his short but strongly worded piece, he lamented the end of the Soviet Union, when he was one of the key figures in the Union of Soviet Writers, and noted that Bondarchuk needed to be remembered above all because he made cinema inspired by Russian literary classics, in particular Leo Tolstoy. Bondarev juxtaposed Bondarchuk’s cinema as the golden age of film art to the present-day era of “barbarism” epitomized by Hollywood blockbusters (Bondarev 2003: 10-11).

Many entries lamented the period of perestroika as the time when Bondarchuk was vilified by glasnost-era filmmakers and predicted that history eventually would prove them wrong and would reestablish the authority of the great filmmaker. The volume’s editor, Ol’ga Palatnikova (a close associate of Bodarchuk’s widow, Irina Skobtseva), wrote that she worked on the volume for two years. Namely, she started developing the volume in 2001, soon after Putin took over the country, and completed it the year when Putin solidified his grip on power by suppressing independent media and arresting politicians challenging his authority. As in a good film, timing was everything in the publication of the book, which strove to vindicate the patriarch of the Bondarchuk dynasty. Meanwhile, right after his death in 1995, film critics were far less unanimous about Bondarchuk’s legacy. In a remarkable tribute to the director titled “The Minstrel of War” (“Pevets voiny”), Elena Gorfunkel’ noted that Bondarchuk “sensed a special beauty in battle, in the spectacle of a parade, in a charge, a campaign, and death itself.” She admitted that he held a special place in the Soviet hierarchy of celebrities on account of his talent in creating epic war films that could hardly fit the widescreen, just as Vasilii Surikov’s giant paintings did not fit the display rooms of art museums. A rhapsodist of war rather than peace, Bondarchuk fit the ethos of Russo-Soviet culture and the official agenda—and passed this legacy on to his son (Fig. x.1).

In our examination of the Bondarchuk clan, above all Sergei and Fedor Bondarchuk, we draw on Leo Braudy’s (1986) and Sharon Marcus’s (2019) discussions of fame, celebrity, and stardom, and make a distinction between a star and a celebrity. Following Braudy’s analysis, as well as Sabrina Qiong Yu and Austin Guy’s 2017 study, we see film stars as defined by their emphasis on performativity and fame based primarily on their screen personae.[[1]](#footnote-1) In contrast, a celebrity exercises social and institutional power, beyond being purely well-known on screen and well-paid for this. Braudy, for example, refers to the career of Ronald Reagan, who started as an actor and a film star but then became a celebrity—a public figure exercising social and political power, beyond just screen recognizability. Fandom plays an important role in constructing a celebrity (Marcus 2019: 3-4).In this article we contend that the Bondarchuk clan is a dynasty of celebrities who have exercised considerable social power for at least the past sixty years. Their story is about maintaining this power, despite all the ups and downs of Russian cultural and political history. In a commercial culture, audience response plays the key role. Obviously, in the case of Soviet celebrities, elevation to the celebrity status rarely happened without government interference. In case of the Bondarchuks, we argue the state was a major fan and major producer of Bodanrchuks’ stardom and celebrity status.

Arguably, being close to the government in a highly centralized polity, such as Russia/the Soviet Union, has been the distinctive feature of this clan of media celebrities. The patriarchs of the Bondarchuk clan combine artistic positions with state service. Both Sergei and Fedor Bondarchuk successfully monetized their cultural capital by making big budget war epics about Russian and Soviet empires. The Bondarchuk dynasty uses the Russian literary canon (Tolstoy, Alexander Pushkin, Vasilii Grossman, Mikhail Sholokhov) to legitimize the empire while enjoying tremendous state financial and material resources to stage their epics.[[2]](#footnote-2) They speak about themselves in dynastic terms. For example, Fedor refers to his son as “Sergei Bondarchuk the second” (Bondarchuk 2003: 525), who, he hopes, will inherit the disposition of his famous grandfather.

Bondarchuk Sr. became a Soviet film star after appearing in Sergei Gerasimov’s *Molodaia gvardiia* (*Young Guard* 1948)and transformed into a celebrity with enormous cultural authority in the process of making his *Voina i mir* (*War and Peace* 1962-1968)*.* The Oscar awarded for this epic film in 1969 played a huge role in establishing Bondarchuk as a new type of Soviet celebrity with international clout. In the context of the Cold War, the Soviet Union sponsored cultural figures loyal to the state to acquire celebrity status beyond Soviet borders. Such were Bondarchuk and Mikhail Sholokhov, the recipient of the Nobel Prize in literature in 1965, and in post-Soviet times Nikita Mikhalkov, the only winner of an Oscar for a feature film among post-Soviet filmmakers. Not surprisingly, Bondarchuk and Sholokhov collaborated on multiple occasions. Bondarchuk’s directorial career began with the adaptation of Sholokhov’s story “Fate of a Man,” which appeared on the pages of the major Party newspaper, *Pravda*,in 1956. In the 1970s Bondarchuk adapted another work by Sholokhov, *Oni srazhalis’ za rodinu* (*They Fought for Their Country* 1975). Like *War and Peace,* the film was a Soviet entry for the Academy Awards.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the Bondarchuks’ close relationship with the state is the circumstances in the production of *War and Peace.* The Soviet government initiated the project in response to the success of the US-Italian adaptation of Tolstoy’s novel directed by King Vidor (1956). In her interview, Anastasiia Vertinskaia[[3]](#footnote-3) succinctly formulated the difference between the two adaptations: “Americans filmed ballroom scenes and love scenes well. But Tolstoy wrote about this in a grandiose way. They [Americans] didn’t have war in their film, war as it was.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The neutral reading of this comment would be that while commercial capitalist cinema emphasized romance as the selling point, a socialist *War and Peace* foregrounded military spectacle. In fact in her posthumous essay on Sergei Bondarchuk, Elena Gorfunkel’ insightfully declared that war was indeed Bondarchuk’s main theme—the natural condition of the world at work in his films, in contrast to the idleness of the world at peace.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Soviet response to Hollywood, of course, was much more than a movie: it was a Cold War-era prestige production destined to counter Hollywood infringement on the Russian classic.[[6]](#footnote-6) The state was the initiator and producer, and Bondarchuk was handpicked by the Minister of Culture, Ekaterina Furtseva, over the objections of the most powerful Mosfilm director, Ivan Pyr’ev, who wanted to direct the epic himself.[[7]](#footnote-7) Yet, most likely, in addition to Bondarchuk's quick rise to international fame after the success of *Sud’ba cheloveka* (*Fate of a Man* 1959), Furtseva was looking for a fresh new front-runner for the post-Stalinist era, and Bondarchuk fit the bill better than the Stalin-era film veteran of kolkhoz musicals. Moreover, the Ministry of Culture and, as it turned out, the Ministry of Defense, wanted to be in control of this important project. Pyr’ev simply had too much power and influence to be an obedient filmmaker, whereas Bondarchuk was still fairly new to directing, with only one previous film under his belt. Finally, Sholokhov supported Bondarchuk after the success of his adaptation of *Fate of a Man,* not to mention thatSholokov, the top Soviet writer from the government’s point of view, was also married to the sister of Nikita Khrushchev’s wife. Family ties speak volumes, especially in a society that operates by *blat* rather than ability.[[8]](#footnote-8) In short, even in the planning stages, the production of *War and Peace* was conducted as a special military operation, to use the language popular with the present-day Russian government.

No expense was spared. The Soviet Ministry of Defense directly contributed between one fourth and one third of the film’s budget, which was a whopping eight million rubles.[[9]](#footnote-9) Not only did the army supply money, people, and hardware, but the Ministry of Defense created a brand new military unit specifically for the needs of the film production—the 11th Special Cavalry Regiment, located near Moscow in the village of Alabino. Fedor Bondarchuk recollects with pride that his father called this unit “a regiment named after me” (“polk imeni mene” (the incorrect folksy spelling is in the original, 518)) because it was created and used for the filming needs of *War and Peace.* Incidentally, during his service in the army in the 1980s, Bondarchuk Jr. was stationed in his father’s unit close to home instead of a regular army unit. Notably, when Putin came to power, he ordered this cavalry to be absorbed into the regiment guarding the Kremlin. It was renamed the Cavalry Escort Squadron, and Putin uses this unit for ceremonial occasions, such as his repeated inaugurations.

Bondarchuk’s four-episode, 400-minute long *War and Peace* is much better at representing war than at delving into *mir,* whether peace or the community.[[10]](#footnote-10) One could argue that this is what an epic film is supposed to do as a spectacle of mass movement of bodies in the battle field or on the ballroom floor—and that is precisely what the Film Academy recognized and rewarded. At a less superficial level, however, the problem is that this epic film could not be more remote from the pacifism of the hypotext by Tolstoy. Moreover, Bondarchuk’s *War and Peace* was not born of artistic soul-searching or even commercial concerns, but mainly served as a salvo in the cultural Cold War, and as such proved most successful.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Sergei Bondarchuk’s celebrity status and his close connection to the state cannot be understood fully without a glance at how his career was propelled by Joseph Stalin himself. After watching Igor Savchenko’s *Taras Shevchenko* (1951), where Bondarchuk played the title character, Stalin noted that Bondarchuk was a genuine people’s artist, and the dictator’s minions immediately awarded Bondarchuk the honorary title of the People’s Artist of the USSR for his roles in *Taras Shevchenko* and in the film adaption of the Stalinist novel by Semen Babaevskii, *Kavaler zolotoi zvezdy* (*Cavalier of the Golden Star,* dir. Iulii Raizman 1951).[[12]](#footnote-12) This promotion skipped a step: As an Honored Artist of the Russian Federation Bondarchuk was due for a promotion to People’s Artist of the Russian Federation, but Stalin’s authoritative decision awarded him the highest rank among Soviet actors at the age of thirty-one (Fig. x.2).

Two things are important here. First, these awards were not purely symbolic; they would come with considerable material perks, such as access to special grocery and consumer goods stores, special spas and medical facilities, much higher salaries, state dachas in the elite gated communities, etc. Second, these honors corresponded to military and *nomenklatura* ranks and connected portfolios of privileges. In this respect, Bondarchuk instantly became the youngest general in the world of Soviet cultural production. A recent documentary about him titled *Sergei Bondarchuk: The Persecution of the Country’s Premier Director* tells the story of the filmmaker who possessed the qualities of a field marshal. One of the interviewees, actor Sergei Nikonenko, praised Bondarchuk’s directorial talent by saying that in his production of *War and Peace* he ruled over 12,000 of extras and a thousand cavalry men. Elsewhere in the film Bondarchuk is called a general of Soviet cinema. This confusion of film and military ranks is neither a coincidence nor hyperbole: being at the helm of Soviet film production was akin to being a leader of a military unit fully financed and backed by the government. In the case of Bondarchuk, it was even more obvious because war and state leadership were the key themes of his filmmaking. Bondarchuk’s second wife, Inna Makarova, also noted that his fast rise to celebrity and power triggered jealousy from his colleagues. She recalled that one of the actresses who told her of his attaining the rank of People’s Artist of the USSR could not conceal her tears of jealousy.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Being a celebrity at the state’s service meant following the state's priorities. Sometimes Bondarchuk was able to negotiate with the state as his major funder and producer. In the early 1970s, he was approached with an idea of making a film about WWII, based on a screenplay by Anatolii Safronov and starring three “magnificent characters”: Leonid Brezhnev, Mikhail Suslov, and the Minister of Defense of the USSR at the time, Andrei Grechko—obviously as their heroic younger selves. After the initial “no” from Bondarchuk, the head of the Soviet film agency (Goskino), Filipp Ermash, asked the director to explain himself. To give Bondarchuk his due, he answered in a Gogolian fashion: “These are not characters. These are ranks” (Bondarchuk 2020: 246). Grechko then summoned the director to the Ministry of Defense and promised unlimited funding: “My tebe vse dadim” (Bondarchuk 2020: 247). Remarkably, Bondarchuk had enough clout to refuse an offer “one cannot refuse” and instead made *They Fought for Their Country,* based on Sholokhov’s novel. As a result, despite his celebrity status in the Soviet Union, he received a lesser prize: the State Prize of the Russian Federation in lieu of the State Prize of the USSR. Bondarchuk’s major fan, the Soviet state, penalized the filmmaker for disobedience.

In the case of the film adaptation of Gogol’s *Taras Bulba*, Bondarchuk was not that lucky. This was his dream project, and Gorfunkel’’ notes that it would have been a perfect aesthetic fit: “Who is Taras Bulba? A professional soldier, a mercenary. War is his life, a pause in fighting makes him restless … while a military campaign transforms and elevates him …. Bondarchuk saw Gogol as a kindred spirit with his dark sublime of the war” (Gorfunkel’ 1995: n.p.), Bondarchuk wrote the screenplay and submitted a request for approval and funding for this project, only to get a rejection: after consulting with the Polish socialist leadership about filming an essentially anti-Polish work, the Central Committee advised Bondarchuk to abandon the idea and make another film adaptation. He made a film based on Anton Chekhov’s *Step’* (*Steppe* 1981)—a two-episode epic about idyllic Russian expanses, which subsume any identity they encounter. The film provides a problematic depiction, to say the least, of Jews living in the Ukrainian prairies. Ukraine in turn is erased completely, apart from occasional toponyms and *vyshyvanki*.[[14]](#footnote-14) The film is an aspiring art cinema text without much of a plot, a travelog seen through the eyes of a young boy Egor—in short, a late take on European art house, in particular Andrei Tarkovsky’s works. As the 1977 Soviet reviewer writes: “Through the eyes of Egor … we see the uninhabited and orphaned steppe—the Rus’ ” (Tolchenova 1977: 101). A remarkable moment of self-reflexivity in the film is a character of a former church singer who has lost his voice, perhaps together with his faith. This character is played by Sergei Bondarchuk himself. While we have no evidence how the viewers received Bondarchuk’s performance in his film, the reviewer described his character as a tragic one (Tolchenova 1977: 113). What is clear about the film’s popularity with moviegoers is that it sold only 3.2 million tickets.[[15]](#footnote-15)

As a court celebrity, Bondarchuk constantly had to compromise on film projects. The next request from the Soviet state was a film adaptation of John Reed’s *Ten Days that Shook the World*. After the release of Warren Beatty’s *Reds* in 1981, Bondarchuk was assigned to adapt Reed’s famous account of the revolution. As Dale Pollock put it in the title of his article “Soviets Counter[ed] ‘Reds’ with Reed Films” (Pollock 1982: 29). Because of its ideological importance, the project had a limitless budget. Soviet authorities exploited Bondarchuk’s international celebrity status and made this filmThe Italian-Mexican-Soviet co-production starred Western actors: Franco Nero, Ursula Andress, and Sydney Rome. Nero recalled that a Soviet Ministry of Culture official joked that the real revolution was less expensive than Bondarchuk’s revolution (Pollock 1982: 29).

Since Soviet cultural producers hoped to exploit Bondarchuk’s international fame and market the film globally, the dialogue was in English, Spanish, and Russian, with additional re-recordings depending on the country of release. The film was also expected to appear on Soviet television as a mini-series and to be shown worldwide, with the exception of the US. Standard accounts of Bondarchuk’s oeuvre—both general memoirs and personal tributes by contemporaries—avoid mentioning this project as Bondarchuk’s accomplishment, though one critic remarked that the director agreed to make *Red Bells* only to get funding for his film *Boris Godunov.*[[16]](#footnote-16)The ending of *Red Bells* is, in fact, quite ambiguous trying to muddy the waters about the ideological stance of the film. On the one hand, it evokes the famous image of the red flag from Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin.* On the other hand, Bondarchuk’s Bolsheviks raise the red flag on the spire of the Peter and Paul Cathedral, which is crowned by a cross and an angel (Fig. x.3). The fact that censors never objected to such a strange pairing suggests that the ideology in the name of which the film was made was disappearing, while Bondarchuk himself did not find the combination of Christian and communist symbols strange. Or perhaps the major Soviet director was trying to cater to his international viewers and present himself as a communist in Christian clothing. Despite all the efforts of the Soviet authorities to promote the film (Fig. x.4), it failed at the box office domestically and had limited international success[[17]](#footnote-17). As for Bondarchuk Sr.’s celebrity status in the film community, Tat’iana Moskvina wrote quite succinctly that after the *Red Bells* “Bondarchuk became the epitome of the “Old Regime” that needs to be destroyed” (Moskvina 2002: 85).

The proximity to government funding and backing was a source of power as well as the Achilles heel of the Bondarchuk dynasty as it represented the Soviet-style celebrity system. Once the state weakened, the clout of the state-sponsored celebrities waned. It is a fair guess that Bondarchuk’s intimate relationship with the Soviet state and the attendant power and privileges were in the minds of the Soviet film community at the Fifth Congress of Filmmakers’ Union in May 1986. As Irina Pavlova notes in her entry about the director in *Noveishaia istoriia otechestvennogo kino*: “For many colleagues Sergei Bondarchuk was a literal embodiment of the Soviet system.” (Pavlova 2001: 151). This explains why the filmmakers did not elect Bondarchuk as a delegate to this perestroika-spirited congress. Together with other film industry generals, Bondarchuk was de facto dethroned and openly criticized for his role in the Brezhnev-era style of leadership and nepotism. The state-sponsored system of celebrity culture shattered, and the future became unknown for the dynasties and especially for the heirs. Not surprisingly, one of the few persons who spoke in Bondarchuk’s defense was Mikhalkov, himself a representative of another powerful clan in charge of the Soviet cultural industry.

Parallel to the revolution at the Fifth Congress, another story unfolded. Prior to the Congress, Soviet cultural authorities selected Bondarchuk’s *Boris Godunov* to represent the USSR at the Cannes Film Festival in 1986. The film was selected strategically to compete with Sweden’s official entry—*Zhertvoprinoshenie* (*Sacrifice*) by Soviet defector-filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky*.* While *Boris Godunov* did not win any awards, Tarkovsky’s film got the Grand Prix and the FIPRESSI awards at the Cannes Film Festival and was also nominated for the Palme d’Or. As Dmitrii Savel’ev notes, no Soviet publication mentioned Tarkovsky’s film as the recipient of any prizes while lauding Bondarchuk's new film (Savel’ev 2002: 76).[[18]](#footnote-18) At the same time Bondarchuk’s film came across as clear evidence of everything wrong with the Soviet state-sponsored celebrity culture (Fig. x.5). The entire Bondarchuk clan performed in *Boris Godunov*: the director played the tsar, his son played crown prince Fedor, and his daughter Elena Bondarchuk and wife Irina Skobtseva also had roles in the film. Pushkin’s name appears first in the credits, blessing the film to follow and suggesting that Pushkin was Bondarchuk’s co-author.Heis that very same ‘imperial’ writer whose monuments are currently being removed in Bondarchuk’s native Ukraine.

In his discussion of celebrity types, Chris Rojek provides a taxonomy of celebrities: ascribed, achieved, and attributed (Rojek, 2001: 17-20). Of interest to this article is the ascribed celebrity—the one whose stems from belonging to a celebrity dynasty. This is the case of Fedor Bondarchuk, who relied primarily on his family influence, specifically his father, who exemplifies Soviet-style achieved celebrity. We claim that Fedor’s initial status in the cultural industry and post-Soviet society at large hinged on his father’s celebrity status, be it that of an omnipotent film general or a deposed one. The deposed tsar is still a tsar, especially if his fall from fame was surrounded by a scandal and overlapped with the demise of the entire empire.

In his contribution to the 2003 volume, Fedor Bondarchuk wrote that his father was taken away from him early by the “traitors who revealed their true nature at the Fifth Congress” (Bondarchuk 2003: 526). His entry ends as follows: “They took him away from me and so far I cannot come to terms with it. Scriptures say: ‘Forgive one another.’ And I struggle with myself. I understand that I shouldn’t harbor evil and I am not evil, but so far I have not forgiven anyone” (Bondarchuk 2003: 527). This almost Hamletian soliloquy is, of course, all about Fedor, who, as the male heir, has to keep the dynasty’s legacy and maintain the social power of the clan. For example, he dedicated his directorial debut, *Deviataia rota* (*The 9th Company* 2005),to his father. He also completed and released his father’s last unfinished project—a screen adaptation of Sholokhov’s *Tikhii Don* (*Quiet Flows the Don* 2006)*.* The film received generous backing from two flagships of Putin-era government media: Channel One, Russia and the revived Mosfilm Studio. Notably, Mikhalkov is present in the project as the off-screen narrator. Bondarchuk Sr. is listed in the credits as the director of the film version while Bondarchuk Jr. is listed as the director of the TV series version. The symbolism of both patriarchs sharing authorship is quite apparent.

Keeping his father’s memory alive is an important filial gesture for Fedor. We, however, suggest that Sergei’s fairly early, according to his son, death allowed Fedor to come into his own as a leading Russian filmmaker, producer, and public figure. Remaining the son of Sergei Bondarchuk, as he had been viewed at the beginning of his career in the 1980s, might have been crippling for the heir. But in the early 1990s, when his father lost most of his power, Fedor found his own path when he co-founded Art Pictures Studio together with Stepan Mikhalkov—the heir of another powerful clan, the Mikhalkovs. Together they pioneered the production of musical videos and commercials in post-Soviet Russia.

In the 2000s Fedor Bondarchuk started working on his debut feature film, which he initially viewed as a remake of *Fate of a Man,* onlyset in Chechnya. This initial plan, however, changed, and together with Ukrainian producer Alexander Rodnyansky (in Ukrainian, Oleksandr Rodnianskyi), he made a different film, *The 9th Company.[[19]](#footnote-19)* The latter film, which sooner resembles a remake of *They Fought for Their Country* set in Afghanistan, initiated Bondarchuk’s long and productive collaboration with Rodnyansky—what we view rather as a relationship of a disciple and a mentor. Arguably, Fedor found a new paternal figure who exercised a huge influence on him and made him more open to the world beyond the familiar Soviet-style inner circle. *The 9th Company* became a commercial success domestically; in fact, it became the highest grossing film since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. With a budget of nine and a half million dollars, the film made twenty-six million dollars in movie theaters.

Box office aside, the film “made” Bondarchuk. Like his father, he was noticed by the government. President Putin invited the film crew to his estate in Novo-Ogarevo, near Moscow, to watch the film together—the first such event at the leader’s home, slightly reminiscent of Stalin’s (in)famous screenings. The president praised the film and compared it to *War and Peace,* which most likely pleased the first-time director (Fig. x.6)*.* “This is a tragic story from the life of our country and our people but people who fought there for their ideals did a good job” (“Putin

praise…” 2005). It is important to note that Fedor went to the screening without his producer/mentor. As Rodnyansky astutely observed in his recent interview: “I understood that I belong to the category of people whom he [Putin] finds unpleasant and incomprehensible. He watched the film with the good-looking and young Fedor Bondarchuk. I think this was the right decision” (Rodnianskii 2002). In the moment of his rise to fame as confirmed by ticket sales and critical acclaim, a different kind of viewing public (president Putin and the state he epitomized) chose Bondarchuk as a useful asset to recruit as a state-sponsored celebrity. In case of authoritarian cultures, such as Russia, the notion of the public that makes the celebrity is somewhat different from what Sharon Marcus argues for in her discussion of Western-style celebrities (2019: 3-4). In addition to moviegoing public as we would expect in a democratic commercial culture, the notion of public includes the authoritarian leader himself and his lieutenants whose gaze can make a government-sponsored celebrity. Like the father, who got his appointment for the production of *War and Peace* directly from the Minister of Culture, the son was anointed by Putin to become a premier film director for the new Putin-style Russia. Putin’s choice of a younger version of a court director in the fashion of Nikita Mikhalkov was well-calculated and a good fit for the rising culture of *ressentiment* against the democratic reforms and globalization.

Fedor Bondаrchuk did not touch WWII early in his career. Instead, he found his own war—the one in Afghanistan, which was a perfect fit both politically and personally. In tune with Putin’s ideology, the film showed how Gorbachev's perestroika betrayed the country and its men. Accordingly, Fedor’s *9th Company* represents the Soviet-Afghan War—a ten-year-long colonial adventure of gerontocratic Soviet leaders—as a rite of passage and story of male bonding. Not once does the 130-minute-long film question why so many Soviet soldiers ended up in Afghanistan, instead showing how tough but benevolent commanders transform youngsters into real men. All participants metonymize fraternal nations of the USSR: Fedor cast himself as a Ukrainian warrant officer, while others play Russian, Chechen, and Uzbek soldiers. Ethnic relations derive directly from socialist realist war films, with friendship tempered only by combat challenges.

The first of the two most ideologically-loaded scenes occurs close to the middle of the film, when after a thorough, rigorous training, the recruits—all of whom apparently *volunteered* to go to Afghanistan—are sent across the border to join the battle. Their mentor, Sergeant Dygalo (Mikhail Porechenkov), is denied this privilege because he has already fought in Afghanistan and was seriously wounded. This comprises Dygalo’s major trauma, according to Bondarchuk: not being able to kill more people in Afghanistan and sustain more injuries. In a long, elaborate shot the warrior cries amidst a field of red poppies. The sentimental militarism of the setup is difficult to exaggerate as well as tolerate. This sentimental militarism resuscitates a major feature of homosocial Soviet cinema.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The second, equally disturbing scene, takes place at the climactic finale. The unitcelebrates the advent of 1989: warriors drink, bond, and talk about returning home after the war. Meanwhile, the radio hums with the treacherous Mikhail Gorbachev’s speech about new thinking, reforms, glasnost, and perestroika. As the warriors grow sleepy their vigilance dissipates, and when evil locals attack them early in the morning, most of the company is slaughtered. What is the connection between Gorbachev’s speech on the radio and the military disaster—or maybe even treason?[[21]](#footnote-21) A partial answer is given when the commanding officer arrives and declares that, despite the defeat of the mujahideens by Company 9, Gorbachev declared the war finished and withdrew the Soviet troops. Moreover, the air waves were clogged, which explains why Company 9 did not hear the order to withdraw. The surviving heroes feel betrayed. This conclusion provides a graphic illustration of not only Putin’s vision of the fall of the Soviet empire as a betrayal and a geopolitical catastrophe, but also Bondarchuk Jr.’s sentiments about the last years of his father’s life and his own precarious status in the late 1980s.

What is peculiar, of course, is that Bondarchuk made his own career before becoming a state-sponsored celebrity. He produced ground-breaking music videos, played all kinds of dramatic roles, from Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot,* to a police officer in a screen adaptation of Boris Akunin’s novel *Statskii sovetnik* (*The State Counsellor,* dir. Filipp Yankovsky 2005), to General Anton Denikin in *Gibel’ imperii* (*the Fall of the Empire* dir. Vladimir Khotinenko 2005). Yet for his first feature film as director he chose to follow in his father’s footsteps: “I wanted to shoot a major, large-scale film, a film about war” (cited in Norris 2022: 153). In other words, he made a military spectacle celebrating war with a claim to authenticity. In a way this project went hand in hand with the training Fedor received from his VGIK mentor, Iurii Ozerov, whose monumental film *Liberation* (*Osvobozhdenie* 1968-1972) was also commissioned and promoted as Soviet-style docudrama, aka the Soviet genre of “historical documentary film” (Romanova 2022).

Fedor Bondarchuk’s debut film portrayed the Soviet colonialist war in Afghanistan as a remake of the Great Patriotic War—that is, a war of liberation. In other words, he established a convenient template that the Russian propaganda machine uses every time Russia invades another country. In contrast to the pacifist *Full-Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick 1987)*,* the film to which *The 9th Company* is often compared, in Bondarchuk’s picture “the war, its costs, and the reasons Soviet soldiers were in Afghanistan do not really matter. What does matter is that they acted heroically” (Norris 2012, 150). Or, to put it in the words of Fedor’s father, “They fought for their motherland.”

After the success of *The 9th Company,* Bondarchuk took advantage of a more diverse system of commercial film genres, and together with Rodniansky made a sci-fi blockbuster, *Obitaemyi ostrov* (*Dark Planet* 2009), based on Arkady and Boris Strugatsky’s 1969 eponymous novel. Later he produced an adaptation of Sergei Minaev’s bestselling novel *Dukhless* (*Soulless,* dir. Roman Prygunov 2012). But the logic of a celebrity closely tied to the state inevitably took him back to war films. In 2012 he co-produced *Avgust. Vos’mogo* (*August Eighth,* dir. Dzhanik Faiziev) about Russia’s war against Georgia, and in 2013 directed Russia’s first IMAX film, *Stalingrad.*

For Putin’s dictatorship, the cult of WWII is a foundational narrative and legitimating strategy. Bondarchuk’s war epic *Stalingrad* tells the story of the magnificent five Soviet soldiers who fight and die in Stalingrad defending their motherland.[[22]](#footnote-22) In the course of the combat, Russian soldiers also protect a girl who gives birth to a son who later claims that he has five fathers.The son appears in the framing story set in the present, where Russian rescue workers, led by the son, help during the Fukushima disaster in Japan. Taking the story full circle, the Russians rescue some German tourists. Some of these tourists might be the descendants of those German invaders, but Russians are forgiving as well as heroic. Erasing the distance between past and present, the film places viewers amidst an eternal emergency situation in which the destiny of the Russian man is to save the world, then and now.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Anastasia Kostetskaia eloquently summed up *Stalingrad’s* myth-making function in Putin’s Russia: “By incorporating his *Stalingrad* into the multifaceted mythic paradigm, director Bondarchuk attempts to create a national myth for contemporary Russia … He … [formulates] Stalingrad as the dreamed-up extra-temporal time-space continuum, where Good wages eternal war against Evil. As such, the film creates ‘the founding myth of Russia’s current peace-keeping missions all around the world, be it on the peninsula of Crimea or somewhere else’” (Kostetskaia 2016: 59).

As *Stalingrad’s* producer Rodnyansky made a self-reflexive disclaimer: “The point is not that we want to show the beautiful flights of bullets or the colorful explosion of shells, we want to convey the special quality of war that existed at Stalingrad” (cited in Norris 2022; 116). Rodnyansky clearly tries to distance himself somewhat from the spectacle of war, which the film and the IMAX technology both enhance and sell. Justin Wilmes pinpointed a relevant key scene favoring spectacle: “In the opening battle sequence, Soviet troops are engulfed in flames by detonated oil tanks, but incredibly they charge forward aflame for hundreds of meters, striking fear into the hearts of the Germans” (Wilmes 2020: 53) (Fig. x.7). Wilmes suggests that this scene portrays the Soviets as superhumans. We might add that it also goes beyond heroism into a spectacular fanaticism akin to a cult of death. Whereas in 2013 such a sequence could pass as a demonstration of technology, in 2023 it reads as an illustration of Putin’s philosophizing about death for the state in battle as the most meaningful goal in a man’s life.[[24]](#footnote-24)

*Stalingrad* received mixed reviews and considerable negative feedback in the social media, which, understandably, disappointed Bondarchuk Jr. Soviet-era celebrity status implied that, once one was on top, one became untouchable. In the post-Soviet cultural scene, however, attaining and maintaining positions became a free-for-all. To boost Fedor’s morale, his savvy producer proposed making a YouTube video, in which both of them read the hate mail aloud. As always, Rodnyansky served as a mentor and therapist to the thin-skinned heir of the Bondarchuk dynasty, demonstrating his firm grasp of celebrity wisdom: there is no bad publicity.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Bondarchuk’s next directorial project was a sci-fi film, *Pritiazhenie* (*Attraction* 2017). Action sci-fi is a high tech and big budget genre, where the director has few competitors in the film industry that is primarily state-financed. In return for state funding, he makes genre vehicles that are commercially viable and loyal to the current ideological agenda. Accordingly, the film borrowed heavily from such Hollywood classics as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (dir. Robert Wise 1951) and *Independence Day* (dir. Roland Emmerich 1996) to depict the crash-landing of an alien spaceship in a Moscow neighborhood. It turns out that aliens ended up on Earth by accident and, as in *The Day the Earth Stood Still,* they are more peaceful and tolerant than earthlings. In fact, they crash-landed only because Russian jet fighters shot at the alien ship and damaged it. Notably, Russian military authorities suspect the UFO of being a NATO aircraft.

What is really striking about the film is that everybody in it is benign: the aliens, the Russian Army, the Russian government officials (as in Soviet films, only lower rank officials can be depicted as flawed characters; Putin flashes by in a montage on a TV screen), and even the Russian police. The only danger and unprovoked aggression originate from a group of young unruly males distressed by the loss of their friends during the unfortunate crash. Wishing to retaliate, they start rabble-rousing on social media. If media and public acting via social media can make or break celebrity, representation of social media as anarchic and dangerous forces became a motif in Bondarchuk Jr.’s *Attraction.* Perhaps this was his response to social media quite critical reception of his previous film *Stalingrad.* At the same time the film picked up government rhetoric about the danger of any grassroot social movement especially boosted via social media.

Notably, *Attraction* came out in 2017, the centennial of the October 1917 coup. As many scholars suggested, the muddled commemoration pointed to Putin’s fear of the very idea of a grassroot movement that can result in a change of regime.[[26]](#footnote-26) In this context, the action sci-fi that portrays popular movement as a greater danger than alien invasion is quite striking and clearly subscribes to the official agenda. It does not take much to identify the young male leader of the social movement, unreasonable and driven by a personal vendetta, as a cypher for Aleksei Navalny—that is, Navalny as denigrated by the Russian government media.

Directing such state-affirming war spectacles as *The 9th Company* and *Stalingrad* coincided with Bondarchuk Jr.’s rise to political power and assured him a Russian-style celebrity with close ties to the imperial center. He joined the United Russia party and soon was promoted to the party’s leadership, soon becoming a member of the Presidential Council on Culture. In 2012, during the highly controversial election of Putin to his third term, he served as Putin’s proxy (*doverennoe litso*).[[27]](#footnote-27) Over the years, Bondarchuk was rewarded for his loyalty with generous funding for his projects as well as a number of top leadership positions in the media industry. In 2008 he co-founded the Glavkino Production Company, backed by the influential VTB Bank, and in 2012 became the Chairman of Lenfilm's board of directors. He also assumed leadership positions in the National Media Group, which, among other assets, includes Channel One, Russia and Art Pictures Studio, and Bondarchuk’s own company. Putin recognized his service by awarding him the prestigious Order of Alexander Nevsky in 2018.[[28]](#footnote-28) All these developments, of course, were reported in the media, enhancing Bondarchuk’s celebrity status.

Yet, his close alliance with Putin’s political machinery notwithstanding, Bondarchuk has tried to avoid his father’s destiny of becoming exclusively a celebrity-on-state-service. As the NMG Studio lead executive, he tries to diversify his identity by serving as the head of his film school, *Industriia*, producing documentaries, establishing charitable foundations, and making TV series for streaming platforms with a more diverse and younger audience. One of the most unconventional and innovative tv dramas of the decade, the 2020 tv-series *Chiki* (*Chics* dir. Eduard Oganesian*,* one of the most unconventional and innovative tv dramas of the decade, is a case in point. It was widely discussed in the critics’ community and became the most viewed Russian tv series on the more.tv streaming platform.

Bondarchuk also tried to establish himself as a different kind of celebrity by pursuing a career of an art filmmaker, or to speak in a more contemporary lingo a quality television director. Тogether with Paulina Andreeva, his scriptwriter and wife, Bondarchuk recently directed a TV series, *Psikh* (*Psycho* 2020), which aspires to be artsy production for streaming platforms. It is a story of a psychotherapist played by a fashionable theater director Konstantin Bogomolov. When Bondarchuk was asked about a career of an art cinema filmmaker-celebrity, he offered this series as an example of his entry into the league. To support his claim, Bondarchuk mentioned a rigorous review and acclaim by the Russian Guild of Film Critics as well as the high ratings of the show on imdb and Kinopoisk. He also mentioned that Russian film critics recognized him with a prestigious White Elephant, the only award from the critics’ guild that he ever got. This question and answer session was part of a master class Bondarchuk Jr. gave at the St. Petersburg State Institute of Film and Television (SpBGIKiT) in fall 2022.[[29]](#footnote-29) It sounds like he is trying hard to dissociate himself and celebrity persona from both the state and the fate of Bondarchuk Sr.’s type of state celebrity.

Rojek’s taxonomy of celebrities comes quite handy here to discuss various responses to the imperial war Russia unleashed in Europe. Achieved celebrities, such as Rodnyansky or Alla Pugacheva, had no trouble voicing their opinion and distancing themselves, both geographically and financially, from the Russian state, with which they had been working more or less harmoniously up to February 24th, 2022. The ascribed celebrities had a much harder time exercising their agency, even if they understood the genocidal nature of Russia’s war against Ukraine since 2014. Fedor Bondarchuk’s response is quite symptomatic. For a while he gave the impression of being a somewhat freer agent who can make his own creative and commercial decisions, unlike his father, whose fate was inseparable from the rise and fall of the Soviet state. Yet Bondarchuk Jr.’s celebrity status seems inseparable from the state and the war it conducts. Many Putin supporters, such as Margarita Simonian or Zakhar Prilepin, make it clear that the powers-that-be expect strong verbal support of the war from Bondarchuk, precisely because of his celebrity status and his affirmed close connection to the state.[[30]](#footnote-30) On multiple occasions they decried what they view as insufficient support of the war on the part of various filmmakers, Bondarchuk being a case in point. In a recent interview, Rodnyansky remarked that Bondarchuk certainly can tell good from evil but, unfortunately, is not a hero or a fighter and therefore chose to stay silent. Most recently, a Russian propagandist Sergei Mardan addressed Fedor Bondarchuk directly: “By the way, it has been a year since the beginning of the special operation, and the favorite filmmaker of comrade Rodnyansky, Sergei Fedorovich Bondarchuk, does not want to state his position. What is his take on the fact that Russian soldiers have been fighting for the entire year at the frontline one thousand kilometers-long? … Nor desire to speak whatsoever? It looks like none” (Mardan 2023). How long this moral stalemate will last remains to be seen. Whether the Bondarchuk dynasty can reinvent itself or will follow the well-trodden path of filmmakers in service to the Russian imperial state is up to Bondarchuk Jr.

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1. Yu and Austin 2017: 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Fedor Bondarchuk claims that his blockbuster *Stalingrad* is partly based on Vasilii Grossman’s *Life and Fate.* It is not an adaptation in the proper sense of the word but the director claims an inspiration from the literary source. We see more of an attempt to use a connection with a literary source as a way to acquire some cultural capital. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A daughter of pre-revolutionary singer-celebrity Aleksandr Vertinskii, Vertinskaia was a spouse of another government-sponsored celebrity Nikita Mikhalkov (1966-1971) and became a major Soviet film star after the release of a sci-fi memlodrama *The Amphibian Man* (*Chelovek-amfibiia* dir. Gennadii Kazanskii and Vladimir Chebotarev 1962). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ‘Ia videla etot fil’m. I bal khoroshii u amerikantsev …i liubov’ oni khorosho igraiut. Nu netu vot etogo. Tolstoi zhe pisal ob etom grandiozno. Tam netu etoi voiny samoi kak takovoi.” (Anastasiia Vertinskiaia in *Bondarchuk. Battle,* dir. Ilya Below, Denis Kataev, Anton Zhelnov, Art Pictures Studio 2021, 19:50-20:15) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Neprazdnoe, trudovoe sostoianie mira.” See Elena Gorfunkel’, “Pevets voiny.” <https://chapaev.media/articles/9993>. Not surprisingly, Bondarchuk’s war films exploit misogynistic imagery. Gorfunkel’ notes about Bondarchuk’s *mise en scène*: “The transformation of a field into a battlefield represents war as a forced loss of innocence, a natural and necessary condition for the continuation of life” (“Prevrashchenie prosto polia v pole boia pokazyvaet voinu poruganiem nevinnosti, estestvennym i neobkhodimym dlia prodolzheniia zhizni”). We argue that such a *mise en scène* remains important for the films of Bondarchuk Jr. as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For a detailed discussion see Youngblood 2014 and Alexander and Elena Prokhorov 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “Voina i mir. Istoriia sozdaniia fil’ma,” <https://www.mosfilm.ru/news/?ELEMENT_ID=38610>. Accessed December 21, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For further discussion of informal economic practices (*blat* being an indispensable part of them), see Alena Ledeneva’s path breaking trilogy 1998-2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Voina i mir. RGALI Fond 2944, opis’ 4, ed. khran.1053 (23). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In modern Russian, *mir* has two meanings. One is world, universe and the other absence of war. Tolstoy’s original title meant “absence of war.” This is clear in pre-1918 Russian orthography because two words: the one that means the universe and the one that mean peace had different spelling. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For a discussion of the film’s place in Cold War-era cultural politics, see Prokhorov and Prokhorova pp. 27-42. Compare the film to Thaw-era adaptations of Anton Chekhov’s works, which told stories of individuals in crisis, or to Ivan Pyr’ev’s self-reflexive adaptations of Fedor Dostoevsky’s works. In contrast, *War and Peace* was commissioned by the state, and it shows. Not surprisingly, the liberal *Novyi mir* critic Igor’ Zolotusskii in 1968 wrote a biting review of Bondarchuk’s epic adaptation. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In most of accounts about why Bondarchuk Sr. received the honorary title, commentators skip mentioning the film adaptation of Semen Babaevskii’s late Stalinist novel (1950). We would argue it is an attempt to obfuscate the source of a state-sponsored celebrity’s fame. See for example, Vladimir Naumov (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The film’s title, *Sergei Bondarchuk: travlia pervogo rezhissera strany* (*Sergei Bondarchuk: The Persecution of the Country’s Premier Director,* dir. Mikhail Anan’ev 2022), is symptomatic of Putin-era reverence for authority and any opposition to authoritarianism. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Vyshyvanka* is a name for the embroidered shirt in Ukrainian and Belarusian national costumes. Ukrainian *vyshyvanka* is distinguished by local features specific to Ukrainian embroidery. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Sergei Kudriavtsev. *Otechestvennye fil’my v sovetskom kinoprokate.* <https://kinanet.livejournal.com/27544.html#cutid1> In the 1970s, an average film would sell about 15-25 million tickets. The top films of the late 1970s would sell 70-80 million tickets. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See *Sergei Bondarchuk: The Persecution of the Country’s Premier Director.* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The film got an award at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival in socialist Czechoslovakia in 1982. See also Sergei Kudriavtsev. *Otechestvennye fil’my v sovetskom kinoprokate.* https://kinanet.livejournal.com/14172.html#cutid1 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Savel’ev also notes that Tarkovsky claimed that his previous film, *Nostalgia,* was undermined by the Cannes Jury member Sergei Bondarchuk in the previous year on the special assignment from Moscow authorities (76). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Aleksandr Rodnyansky took over Russian STS tv channel in 2002 and worked in Russia till February 2022. For the story of his involvement with *The Ninth Company* production see *Vykhodit prodiuser* (Rodnianskii 2022: 161-200). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For further discussion see Prokhorov (2007: 67-71). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. In an uncanny parallel to this scene, on New Year’s Eve of 2023, Ukrainian forces launched an attack on a building housing newly-mobilized Russian soldiers in the Russia-occupied Ukrainian town of Makiivka. The missile strike, which killed several hundred personnel and destroyed military equipment, reportedly occurred as soldiers were watching Putin's midnight address. See Bigg, Kurmanayev, and Pérez-Peña, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/02/world/europe/ukraine-russia-himars-makiivka.html>

    [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For an extensive discussion of gender politics in Russian culture see Goscilo and Lanoux (2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Of course, this representational politics is not unique, any cultural industry that fancies itself as representing a “superpower” tends to do the same. For a discussion of Hollywood and post-Soviet films using this narrative pattern, see Goscilo and Goscilo (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. On Russian Mother’s Day in November 2022, President Putin met with mothers of the soldiers who serve or died in the current war with Ukraine and explained to them how meaningful the soldiers’ deaths were compared to the more common Russian males’ demise from vodka: “Nekotorye ved’ zhivut ili ne zhivut–neponiatno, i kak ukhodiat–ot vodki ili eshche ot chego-to–neponiatno, a potom ushli. Zhili ili ne zhili? … A vash syn zhil. Ego tsel’ dostignuta. V etom smysle, konechno, ego zhizn’ okazalas’ znachimoi, s rezul’tatom. Prichem s takim, k kotoromu on stremilsia.” (“Vstrecha s materiami voennosluzhashchikh, uchastnikami SVO,” 25 November, 2022. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69935>). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The attributed celebrity status of Fedor is quite different from that of another attributed celebrity, Ksenia Sobchak. She is also an heiress of a powerful dynasty, but in contrast to Fedor, she thrives on negativity and scandal and intentionally creates situations that generate negative publicity and millions of hate posts in social media. We think that the difference in Fedor’s and Ksenia’s response to negative feedback comes from their relationship to their celebrity father figures. Sergei Bondarchuk was a Soviet film tsar untouchable by his critics. Anatolii Sobchak built his celebrity status as a politician competing in democratic elections and public debate, and public debate was part and parcel of this brief moment in recent Russian history. Dynastic gender dynamics, especially in a patriarchal culture such as Russia, also plays a role: the expectation for a male heir to live up to his father’s status is much higher than for a woman. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. For an insightful discussion of the matter, see Il’ia Kalinin’s “The Spectre of Revolution. How Putin will be Commemorating 1917” (2017: 17-19). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The *doverennoe litso* (proxy) institution emerged during perestroika as an effort to allow citizen participation in the elections. Soviet electoral law from 1989 allowed up to 10 proxies who were able to coordinate activities on behalf of the candidates, write and speak for the candidates in their absence at meetings and media outlets. For example, Lev Ponomarev served as a proxy for Andrei Sakharov during perestroika electoral campaigns. For a discussion of the *doverennoe litso* role in late Soviet and early post-Soviet elections see Stephen Kotkin (1991: 162-163). Under Vladimir Putin, the institution of electoral proxy turned into a way for Putin to exploit the status of celebrities to boost the dictator’s own legitimacy. The status of Putin’s proxy comes with considerable perks. For further discussion see Elena Rykovtseva (2017). Chapter 43 of The Federal Law on Presidential Elections in Russian Federation allows the candidate to have up 600 proxies. <https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_40445/> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Presidential Decree 21 August 2018 #488. Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii “O nagrazhdenii gosudarstvennymi nagradami Rossiiskoi Federatsii.” <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201808210048?index=28&rangeSize=1> [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. “Master-class rezhissera” *KiT TV* (2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. In his interview with Viacheslav Manucharov, Zakhar Prilepin bemoaned famous Russian filmmakers who refuse to make a feature film about the so-called special military operation. Prilepin chuckled when the interviewer suggested Fedor Bondarchuk: “Bondarchuk has a different point of view. First, he has been keeping silent about it. Second, something tells me he has a very complicated view of this topic. So–no.” The very next day these words were repeated on dozens of media outlets and pro-government blogs. This amplification in the country full of paranoia and gossip puts a lot of pressure on the subject. See Prilepin (2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)