

Tuning the Family Piano: Some Stately Harmonies in Recent Russian and Uzbek Film

Introduction

In Kira Muratova's dark comedy of 2004, "The Piano Tuner" (*Nastroishchik*), a young conman by the name of Andrei finds himself left momentarily alone by his soon-to-be victims, a couple of middle-aged women. As he ponders the piano he has offered to fix and the antiques he plans to swipe, the ladies prepare tea, cheese and biscuits in the kitchen. Pleasantly surprised at the initial ease with which his deceit has met success, Andrei lapses into a formless musical improvisation, wiggling his tongue, humming and strumming on some non-existent stringed instrument. The ladies in the kitchen start to worry about leaving this odd stranger alone: "Maybe he's a Jew," says one of them, "Maybe a Chechen, perhaps Armenian?" Increasingly unnerved by this dodgy exotic presence on the other side of the wall, one of the women hurries into the corridor and eavesdrops on Andrei. She listens to his tuneless warbling and twanging, pondering the issue of his nationality one more time. Only when the sounds become unspeakably dreadful does she whisper to herself: "Uzbek."¹

This distancing of oddity serves to define the ladies' normality; it needs to be noted, defined and then kept at arm's length for a Russian normalcy to recognize itself. Unnerved by this bond with strangeness, Russia's experience of Central Asian culture has, all humor aside, been a centuries-long tale of massive distancing or repression in two senses; Moscow so often suppressed some kind of sidelined or "zero-Islam" it needed for self-definition, only then to invade and *inhibit* Islam in the 1860s, when Slavs conquered

the broader realm of Central Asia. Imperial Russia thus augmented its status as the one Christian political realm that included a major Islamic (territorially contiguous) component within itself. This would remain problematic. Major elements of Russia's stately structure and unwavering symbolism, especially in prior, formative centuries, had depended upon a rhetorical capacity for juxtaposition(s) with Islam, for keeping it "elsewhere" by means of unflattering contrast. Islam was a negative, yet inherently indispensable element in the definability of the positive. A modern, most secular parallel might lead us to suggest that likewise in mathematics the number *zero* is needed to even start counting from (or *as*) "one," even though nullity does not exist as such.

Russia ignored itself in order to invade itself, all to no apparent benefit. Joseph Schumpeter once asserted that all empires are affectively atavistic (i.e., driven in the present by experiences of the past) and paradoxically, "defensively aggressive." Empires generate reasons to protect themselves from "probable" invasion and thus occupy terrain on their periphery. Yet that just creates a new periphery. This sounds exhausting and certainly was so for Moscow: "It may be argued that adding Turkestan to the empire sapped, rather than strengthened Russian security."² As assaults upon Islam became nasty in the late 1920s, it was indeed impossible to have or define a limit. This was either because imperial expansion in Schumpeter's terms is an "attitude" (not a plan) or because the best exponents of the Party line, i.e., the most vigorous, were often criticized explicitly by Moscow for "excess," for *violating* the same Party guidelines.³

It is according to these agonizing paradoxes that things Uzbek, for example, are so often handed back to humor, the most famous example of all being the 1970 comedy "White Sun of the Desert" (*Belye solntse pustyni*). Set on the Caspian shores of Dagestan

and in Turkmenistan, this film concerns the adventures of a Civil War soldier fighting off Basmachi rebels with guns - whilst saving their harems with kindness. Originally planned for filming in Uzbekistan, the movie utterly charmed Brezhnev on its initial, cozy debut at his dacha. He declared the film “as good as any American western,” as did 50 million other people around the Soviet Union.⁴ The most famous aphorism from this witty consideration of Russia’s relation to Central Asia declares “the East is a delicate matter” (*Vostok – delo tonkoe*). The ability of both Brezhnev’s policy and his state-funded movies to manage a delicate, yet workable rhetoric of harmony with Asia is sorely missed by Putin; a nostalgic TV series depicting precisely these days in Brezhnev’s dacha picked up the biggest award of 2005, the *Tèfi*.

The respectful oppositions of 70s’ détente made good sense; they were stable enough to withstand some disrespectful ribbing, too. In today’s environment, however, this dogma of flexible difference, as we might term it, is somewhat more elusive and yet, when successful, a massive safeguard against all things dangerous. This paper will examine three places in which Russia and Uzbekistan, sometimes unnerved by each other, have sought anew for that Brezhnevian balance, for some common ground amid all manner of “extremist” worries after 9:11 and the mess left by a pointless invasion of Iraq.

First of these is the way in which Russian media has struggled to talk openly of the tragedy of Andijan, in particular after the Dubrovka theater siege and Beslan. Secondly, in the spirit of our opening example from filmmaking, there is good cause for suggesting that the “use” of Uzbekistan and more general issues of Central Asian or Islamic culture have been the *sine qua non* of Russia’s cinematic blockbusters since 2004. Thirdly, a reverse process is discernible in Uzbek moviemaking, too, since any

form of sociopolitical détente requires symmetry, at least in theory. Zulfiqor Musakov's hit comedies of 2002 and 2003 will be offered as examples of how big-screen Uzbek stories are, in similar ways, dependent upon cultural linkages of years gone by. Russia, having so often kept Islamic culture at arm's length in order to define its alterity, needs and wants to keep it comfortably, recognizably close. Uzbek filmmakers often wish the same of their shifty northern neighbor.

In the new millennium and its creation of new sets, states and genres, sociopolitical relations have changed between Russia and Uzbekistan, in particular *vis à vis* the United States and, in turn, Moscow's policy towards Afghanistan. American operations in Afghanistan, directed since 2001 from an Uzbek airbase close to the border, were left alone if – in turn – Russian operations in Chechnya were spared from frequent American critique. Thus dealings between Uzbekistan and the US generally improved but Russo-Uzbek relations were soured.

Since the closing of that base in 2005 and the ejection of the Americans, however, Karimov and Putin have grown closer. The most recent struggle between American policy and these Russo-Asian relations took place when a tragedy occurred in the Uzbek town of Andijan, close to the Kyrgyz border; according to unofficial reports, hundreds of people were slain by police gunfire after a local uprising. This occurred in a nation where the United States still has a vested interest in oil and gas reserves; so much so, in fact, that Washington had granted the Karimov government more than 50 million dollars of aid in 2004. Over 20% of this sum was destined to bolster law enforcement, resulting in what Human Rights Watch termed a somewhat “schizophrenic policy.”⁵ Senator John

McCain, in a similar vein, called America's relationship with Uzbekistan "very difficult, if not impossible."⁶ Andijan had caused these problems; how did Russia react?

The "Impossible Difficulties" of Talking about Andijan

The consequences of any gap between rhetoric and reality were underscored for both Washington and Moscow on Thursday May 12, 2005. A large crowd in Andijan had protested the imprisonment of twenty-three businessmen, accused of involvement with Islamic extremist groups. Many of the outdoor protestors, however, viewed the prisoners as victims of taxation and trading laws that were stifling business along the Ferghana Valley. Corporate or bureaucratic risk was here being demonized by a different story, by talk of a terrorist threat. Tensions came to a head rapidly when, under cover of night, the jailhouse was attacked by masked gunmen. Suddenly not only the twenty-three suspects were free, but many other individuals associated with their case and a large number of unrelated inmates, perhaps two thousand in all. An uprising began. Key administrative buildings were seized.

Disorder soon ruled Andijan, countered only by orderly daytime gatherings of the populace on a central civic square: up to fifty thousand townspeople, by some estimates. Calls for the removal of President Karimov from power were stopped short around 6pm, when armed government troops opened fire both on presumed insurgents (outdoors) and the glass-strewn corridors of state buildings claimed by angrier, more evident rebels. Government media announced approximately ten deaths after the shooting ceased; independent sources broadcast much higher numbers of local deaths, often over five

hundred. Purportedly, many citizens were removed and “disposed of” so quickly by government forces that an accurate body count was impossible.

In this brief and panicked turmoil, the Western media saw possible parallels with recent uprisings in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, while more skeptical analysts noted that the ability of Uzbekistan, Russia and China to blame Andijan’s jailbreak upon Islamic extremism was actually helping the mythmaking policies of those three governments, especially after the events of May 5, 2001. At that time Karimov had ended Uzbekistan’s membership in GUUAM, thus removing his nation from official interaction with either Georgia or Ukraine - and slowly increasing contacts with Russia instead. In fact with regard to another possible “orange” or “green” revolution, the Russian-language Ukrainian press was equally skeptical of any such romanticism from, say, the BBC, who were allegedly relying on ex-pat sources sympathetic to overnight regime change.⁷

Russia’s own reaction to the events in Andijan was complex and just as schizophrenic as Washington’s. Sergei Lavrov, Russia’s Foreign Minister, noted that the United States had already taken measures to warn American citizens of “terrorist activity” in Uzbekistan. Russian claims of Taliban or Chechen involvement in Andijan would not, therefore or “logically,” differ from any information sources employed in other nations.⁸

Challenging these official attitudes would be difficult. Cable television in Uzbekistan usually provides access to a range of Russian TV stations, CNN, BBC and other international media. Radio stations such as *Svoboda*, the BBC World Service or “Voice of America” are also accessible.⁹ On May 13, however, they all fell off the radar, together with *Deutsche Welle*. Uzbek viewers using their remotes to watch NTV now

found nothing more than music videos on offer; CNN was replaced by various Uzbek shows. A large number of Russian news sites were likewise blocked on-line, including Lenta.ru and Gazeta.ru.¹⁰ The key unofficial website for Uzbek news, Ferghana.ru, was said to be “non-existent or temporarily out of order.” Absence became increasingly present in the state’s turns of phrase. By using anonymizers, ironically, “Ferghana” was nonetheless back on-line within several hours after suffering more obstruction than either the BBC or Centralasia.org.¹¹ The troubling multiplicity of a defended or threatened democracy was thus sometimes unable to voice itself, due to the zeal of those very (official) defenders.

Within Russia itself, although television stations such as ORT could certainly be expected to dampen any talk of democratic idealism, other minor realms of the Russian-language media offered a large number of dissenting voices.¹² Audible disagreement was directed at Russia from without, too, most notably in the form of George Soros’ observation that the massacre in Andijan, made possible only after Karimov’s telephone discussions with Putin, constituted “one of the worst political crimes committed in the 21st century.”¹³ Some Russian newspapers considered this a predictable display of bile, given that Soros had lost approximately two billion dollars in Russia’s stock market crash of the late nineties.¹⁴ *Pravda* suggested that Soros’ rhetoric was too redolent of Chechen news sources, which were claiming that Russian soldiers had been flown to Andijan to lead the armed retaliation against protesters. The Kremlin’s Press Office, in even more forthright terms, singularly defined Soros’ wayward remarks as “nothing more than the product of his imagination; they have nothing to do with reality.”¹⁵

Some kind of structure amid all this disorder was suggested by *Radio Svoboda*, specifically in its questions as to why the Andijan protestors had requested Putin's intervention in their telephoned statement to the editors of Ferghana.ru. The text of the call was as follows. It gave coherence not only to a multitude of messy state missives, but to brief and troubled quotes gathered by Russian journalists from locals on the street on Andijan, claiming – despite tales of Islamic extremism – that “we just want work and democracy.”¹⁶

We call upon Russia's leadership and personally upon President Putin to intervene in the situation. We ask that Russia mediate in our discussions with the Uzbek authorities. We do not wish for massive bloodshed or victims. There are, however, already victims. Today on the main civic square more than fifty thousand people have gathered. Since morning troops and the police have been shooting from armored personnel carriers at the women. But we, too, have taken some prisoners, including several police officers and snipers hired to kill us. We ask that the Russian people, as President Putin, intervene in the events of Andijan.¹⁷

The rioters had invoked the old Soviet center, said *Radio Svoboda*, because land ownership around Andijan has plummeted over the last fifteen years, part of a general social disparity between Uzbekistan and Russia. The latter nation remains a benchmark for disgruntled Uzbeks both because of the Soviet past (when Asian “progress” was always a notion relative to buoyant Muscovite rhetoric) and because of the three million

Uzbek guest workers who today see Russia's "well-stocked shop shelves and reasonably well-dressed people in Siberia, Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk or Surgut. All of this - from the viewpoint of your typical Uzbek – looks heavenly." Hopes, claimed *Svoboda*, "for a good future and for a good life were therefore associated either with the Soviet period or automatically transferred to today's Russia."¹⁸

This difficult interface of retrospection and progression between two nations (and various patriotisms) was even more openly discussed by Russia's neo-communist press. The newspaper *Za SSSR* held that Karimov needed Putin's view as that of a strong, approving ally, not because the Uzbek leader cares for the wellbeing of Andijan's estimated eighty Russian residents.¹⁹ After Putin's blessing, the Uzbek president was able, in the words of newspaper *Kommersant*, to show his recently-deposed Kyrgyz neighbor with confidence that "he is no Akaev."²⁰ Any such arrogant ability, however, was not initially apparent to the Kremlin, hence the phone call, so Putin could assess the strength of this religiously-driven Islamic uprising, something potentially of danger to both Tashkent and Moscow.²¹

These differing aims and worries eventually found some extra, tidy concord in a subsequent announcement from the Kremlin's Press Office, defining a shared diplomacy born of "serious concern over the dangers of destabilization."²² The two leaders thus "agreed to continue their consultations."²³ Détente and a faux fraternity would be of mutual interest.

Consultations and their Limits: *The Twins, Heaven and Earth and Company Nine*

Part of this ongoing interaction (or respectful distance) would be cultural as much as political. Perhaps the strongest link between Uzbek and Russian culture has been cinematic, given the invaluable safety offered Moscow's feature-film and animation studios during the WWII evacuations to Central Asia. Recent TV series and films of the last few years have made good use of Uzbek locals, albeit according to the clichés of illogicality that we see in *The Piano Tuner*. They shuttle between the drug trade (i.e., social discord) or erstwhile armed conflict in the name of Soviet defense (social harmony). The trickiest of all these balancing acts, one that has threatened to damage mutual respect, was the 2005 TV series "Twins" (*Bliznetsy*, dir. Zinovii Roizman), starring Èlvira Bolgova and Andrei Sokolov, which spent approximately \$3 million in order to record "love and genuine human emotions" amid criminal intrigue over two decades in Moscow, Tashkent, Samarkand, Samara, Novgorod, St. Petersburg and London. After an ill-advised love affair with the daughter of a Soviet official in 1986, Detective Erozhin (Sokolov) accepts a transfer to Uzbekistan in order to avoid any professional fallout. There he makes contact with a fellow police officer, a friend from his student years, Vakhid. Erozhin learns that Vakhid's daughter Fatima had always been a major headache for the family and has now left home, committing a series of crimes across several Asian republics.

Bolgova, playing the role of Fatima, in fact had to play three different sisters, and so our theme of self-realization is physically dispersed, too, not just across space, but into forms of different (and yet closely related) people.²⁴ The film crew handled flashback scenes of the threesome by swapping a couple of newborn babies every so often and subsequently, in teenage scenes, a couple of 14-year old twins. In adult episodes, it fell to

Bolgova to show a more complex experience through more roles, whilst simultaneously adopting the “unifying” gait and speech patterns of Russian-speaking Uzbek women.²⁵

Using doubles or split-screen techniques, Bolgova’s movement across the screen was often quite literally drawn on the floor, so that any subsequent movements of another sister could be pasted into scenes without the technical problems caused by overlapping bodies. Stuntmen and naked screen doubles (shot from behind) were likewise employed, multiplying Bolgova’s presence on screen further still.²⁶ And yet, for all its complexity, the plot of “The Twins” and its vacillating identities seemed so familiar and natural to Russian viewers that one journalist even suggested that it had been taken from some beloved Bollywood films.²⁷ There was something in the plot that allowed for an old-fashioned managed multiplicity – taken from Soviet notions of foreignness.

Bliznetsy was actually taken in part from the real world, since Erozhin and Vakhid are based upon real-life policemen from Moscow and Samarkand. The relationship between them, among subplots of bribery or infidelity in the Uzbek police force, was too real for the Uzbek government, though; although much of the series was filmed in Samarkand and flatteringly showcases a great deal of local architecture, Uzbek State TV banned *Bliznetsy* from the airwaves, declaring its subject matter “contrary to the national spirit.”²⁸ It had dragged its heroine too far from home, making her subject to the shuttling patterns of the international drug trade.²⁹ Moscow and Tashkent, giving voice to a commonality, differed over degrees to which it might incorporate difference.

Equally dramatic was the sixteen-series, 2004 drama *Heaven and Earth*, employing two stars from Aleksei Sidorov’s *Brigada*, Russia’s biggest crime drama of late: Ekaterina Guseva and Vladimir Vdovichenkov. It was directed in Minsk by Viktor

Sergeev, which made things difficult for Guseva. She was performing simultaneously in the Moscow musical *Nord-Ost* and Belarus' position on the map did little to lessen a difficult workload; she would travel back and forth between the two cities on night trains.³⁰ It was, however, thanks to precisely to this movement that she found herself away from Moscow's Dubrovka theater on the night when it was attacked by Chechen rebels to tragic effect. One hundred and thirty hostages would die; the TV drama had no idea its subplot would run so close to reality, and consequently advertised itself with an initial emphasis upon some Muscovite, melodramatic aspects rather than any naturalistic depiction of physical breakdown in Asia's drug dens. Here there is only the slightest hint of "terrorist-related" activity.

The action takes place in the imaginary town of Surdiansk. Relations are strained between the heroine (a stewardess called Marina) and her husband, airline captain Viktor Shvedov. Viktor, despite problems both at home and with his health, refuses to grant Marina a divorce. [On a routine flight,] the airline "Aviakom" receives a threatening note: "The steel bird will also fall." Several passengers receive the same note. Panic sets in on board and the air stewards try to calm the passengers. After the incident Marina promises her husband that from now on they will always fly together...

The tales of airborne drug-runs to Uzbekistan in *Heaven and Earth* are complicated even more by the fact that Guseva had almost died performing in a tale of

Soviet harmony. Criticizing the series would seem churlish - and so Karimov stayed quiet. The musical draws upon Veniamin Kaverin's adventure story *The Two Captains* that maps the spread of Soviet harmony beyond the limits of political cartography, moving themes of love and charity out into the frozen north over a thirty-year span, between 1913 and 1943. *Nord-Ost* is "an explanation of the Soviet past in personal, not political, terms. Moreover, it projects the past onto the present, seeking continuity. [It is] a symbol of Russia—not of the new Russia, but of a country with tradition, rather than one where traditions were severed."³¹

Recent Russian films of kinder intent position their Uzbek characters in a similarly sweeping, if not generalized embrace. Typical is Genadii Sidorov's *Little Old Ladies* (*Starukhi*) of 2003. In a village near Kostroma, some pensioners help a family of Uzbek refugees to establish home in a strange environment. In return the Islamic neighbors help in the final scenes to establish a means of producing electricity for their Slavic benefactors; they downscale the impersonal grandeur of Soviet construction to a kinder, calmer level that can survive perfectly well after 1991. The trouble, however, is that the film is so divorced from actuality that the Uzbek family actually speaks Tajik through the film, given that Sidorov invited Tajik, not Uzbek actors to play the role of good-natured Asian migrants.³²

Last year the biggest, boldest and most profitable of these generalizations was a blockbuster movie of the Afghan conflict, "Company Nine" (*Deviata rota*), directed by Fedor Bondarchuk. Within five days of its release in late September 2005 it had recouped its entire budget and been seen by 2 million people. Two thousand extras and 9 million dollars were needed to fuel the story's creation, along with 25,000 cups of tea and coffee,

plus 35,000 breakfasts and lunches. No mention was made in the promotional materials of either vodka or any food after lunchtime.³³ Thanks to major financial investment from the Kremlin, thirty tanks, fifty armored vehicles, 10 aircraft and 23 helicopters took part in the (loud) action. This major epic was directed by the son of famous Soviet director Sergei Bondarchuk, responsible not only for the interminable socialist adaptation of “War and Peace” (1968-68) but WWII dramas such as “A Man’s Destiny” (*Sud’ba cheloveka*, 1959) and “They Fought for their Homeland” (*Oni srazhalis’ za Rodinu*, 1975). Concluding these parallels was the fact that *9 rota*’s soundtrack was mixed at Pinewood Studios in England, being only the second Russian film to enjoy such (pricey) services since Sergei Bondarchuk’s *Waterloo* in 1970.³⁴

Although the son dedicated his debut to the Soviet oeuvre of his father, “Ninth Company” has just as much in common with American dramas such as “Full Metal Jacket” (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1987). Precisely these parallels have been made in the Russian press, together with related grumblings that the film falls a tad short of the narrative or technical standards set by “Saving Private Ryan” (Steven Spielberg, 1998) or “Black Hawk Down” (Ridley Scott, 2001). It concerns the awful episode in the Afghan campaign of Hill 3234, when a lofty encampment of great use to the Soviet artillery came under massive rebel attack in January 1988, even though the actual Soviet operation (“Magistral”) was designed at the time to guarantee the safe delivery of substantial provisions to the local population.

Why make a heroic film from a tragic moment in a tragic, lost war? One journalist has declared the relative pettiness of valorizing a campaign in which an average of 1,688 people died each year between 1979 and 1989 – because nowadays 35,000 people die in

Russian road accidents alone. Somebody was looking hard for a cause to champion. Perhaps, the same reporter then noted with bitterness, *Deviatia rota* is the attempt of a pointless generation, the children of once-important parents, to valorize that very status of pointlessness, to make something from nothing?³⁵ Islamic opposition seems to do the trick, conjured from thin air to fill an equally vacuous space.

The relation of this film to actuality has been hotly debated in the press since last autumn; some journalists have stubbornly asked, for example, why it was necessary to exaggerate the number of victims of one particular cargo-plane crash - and then animate it digitally for \$450,000. Perhaps the director wanted to dramatize the loss not of a division, not even of his family's cultural importance, but an *entire culture*?³⁶

Footage shot in Moscow, the Crimea and Uzbekistan was used to tell this sorry tale.³⁷ Any forgotten culture in *9 rota* is in part represented by Chechen and Uzbek members of the company, who – in the former instance – have no problem being referred to as *churka*, just as their Ukrainian commander is untroubled by his nickname of *khokhol*. This, after all, is a movie that tells of a bygone time when “fifteen republics were fifteen sisters” and the permissibility of such names was actually proof of “fraternal relations.”³⁸ Several web-based forums have gone to some effort in order to likewise note the number of Uzbeks who served in Afghanistan, together with the importance of Uzbekistan as a safe base from which the Soviets could operate prior to seeing active service.³⁹ Productive social bonds are fondly remembered (or *created* for the memory).

The representative of Asian safety for Company Nine is the Uzbek character Kurbashi (played on film by Amadu Mamadakov). He represents the warmth of social cohesion. In the novel, Kurbashi's homeland initially takes some Siberian recruits by

surprise, scorched white as it is by the Ferghana sun.⁴⁰ The girls of the region bring life to this baked emptiness – in particular their skirts of mythical fineness that become transparent when lit from behind.⁴¹ In the simplest possible terms, Kurbashi tells a wounded soldier that he will be taken by helicopter to Tashkent - and “it’s good there. It’s warm. There’ll be a pretty little nurse in a gown. They make sure you rest - and then you get to go home.” In the final moments of the awful conflict, Kurbashi cares for a conscript to the bitter end, attending to his bandages “like a baby” and shielding his eyes from the unforgiving sun.⁴² Uzbekistan and its stalwart representative are the very embodiment of the Termez Friendship Bridge. The banality or nothingness of the bridge’s politicized name becomes a life-threatening challenge; there is no time for cynicism when dogma is vivified or fully enacted.

The film’s promotional materials also stress the fact that this motley crew of unrelated socialist conscripts, told in training that they were “nothing” (a mere “penal division” of disparate nobodies), in fact produced an inordinate number of socialism’s highest honors: “Heroes of the Soviet Union.” In fact a TV series entitled *Penal Battalion* (*Shtrafbat*), based on the virtually anonymous criminal divisions of WWII, won first prize at this year’s *Tèfi* awards – along with the aforementioned and loving biography of Brezhnev.

Some Afghan veterans felt that the Chechen and Uzbek characters were employed simply as a nod in the direction of internationalism, whereas the film *in toto* smells strongly of something Russocentric. The issue of the “good Chechen,” inserted into recent, essentially xenophobic movies in the name of diplomacy, has been much discussed in the Russian media. Problems of Russia’s actual relationship to Islamic

cultures, to either an inclusive or antagonistic stance, reappeared at the official presentation of “Company Nine” to President Putin. After watching the film, he noted publicly, just as Brezhnev with *Beloe solntse pustyni* that “I forgot about everything and experienced only what was happening on the screen.”⁴³ Elsewhere he tried to step further away from any binarisms that might force him to clarify the messy ethnicity of Soviet warmongering. He claimed that despite being a tragic tale, *9 rota* shows positive traits of “people” (pure and simple) under great pressure. An apolitical and flattering fantasy was clouding over an eternally manipulated actuality. Indeed the inclusion of brave men from Siberia in the screenplay led to squeals of delight from northern lads in web forums.⁴⁴ Their wish fulfillment on screen overshadowed anything resembling critical inquiry.

The role of manhandled minorities in a losing or lost conflict was thus dealt with by ignoring the problem. Nostalgia, revisionist wish-fulfillment and the needs of current détente led to a story of shared ideals, of qualities purportedly on offer to everybody – and therefore to *nobody in particular*. What appeared to Siberian teenagers a cheery principle was somewhat more clearly and sarcastically rephrased by the *Independent* newspaper (*Nezavisimaja gazeta*): “It doesn’t matter how much you’ve been f***ed by your homeland, you must remain a man and a human being.” Or, alternatively, it could be turned on its head to create an antagonistic version, too: “Don’t think about whom or why you’re killing. There are only us and them.”⁴⁵

This element of timelessness (that stops any worsening loss) comes in part from the film’s striking visual element, from the fact that Bondarchuk has been well-known for several years as a maker of music videos. The lower frame rate in many action sequences of “Company Nine” produces a stuttered or strobe effect that some Russian journalists

saw as a “deceleration” of time’s passage in the narrative.⁴⁶ This modish, Peckinpah-like quality led *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* to declare *9 rota* the best-looking Russian movie for 20 years. Time is not just stopped; it is pushed aside and started anew.⁴⁷ How fortunate.

Animosity beyond the Friendship Bridge: *Countdown*

Russia’s president is well aware of TV and cinema’s role in creating the nation and neighbors he would like to see. At the end of 2003 he paid a visit to Mosfil’m studios, where he was asked about his attitude to TV series today and their displacement of earlier Brazilian and Mexican dramas. “Of course it’s a good thing,” he said. “People watch homemade series because they show our life. After all, how interesting can it possibly be to find out who got some Conchita or other pregnant?”⁴⁸ Television has lots of work to do at home if it hopes to satisfy the government’s desire: serious and socially consequential work. Some notable examples or variations upon the theme of social conflict, of the well-armed action flick since Putin’s inauguration have been *Brother 2* (*Brat 2*, 2000), *The Sisters* (*Sestry*), *War* (*Voina*, both 2002), and *Bimmer* (*Bumer*, 2003). In action movies where irony is absent, one feels a direct influence of policy, no more so than when Uzbeks or Chechens are around.

The best illustration of recent storytelling with one foot on the Friendship Bridge would be Evgenii Lavrent’ev’s *Lichnyi nomer* (*Countdown*) of 2004, an action movie produced jointly by the Kremlin-run television station ORT, a major oil company and a national veteran’s group. “Countdown” outlined its central theme as follows:

Terrorists from the group 'Ansar Allah' have announced a Holy War against civilization. They have a plan to turn Rome, the Eternal City, into a city of eternal death. Yet the world will be saved by the courage and heroism of Agent Smolin, by the selflessness and professionalism of [American journalist] Catherine Stone, and the strength of spirit within Umar the Chechen. Helped by the joint action of Russian and Western Special Forces, all captives will be freed and the world saved from the threat of a monstrous act of terrorism... This film is full of unique special effects, never before seen in world cinema; they will keep the viewer in suspense from the opening credits to the final scene.

The two main areas in which “Countdown” lays claim to being a blockbuster are financial and thematic. Both of these are then designed to fuel a third element of grandeur, a “new” sense of pride and self-definition as per President Putin’s rhetoric. This movie was generously funded by state coffers (10% of its \$7 million budget) and many newspapers reported that initial, closed screenings of the film were made to both Putin and Nikolai Patrushev, head of the FSB. They both liked it very much. Aleksei Makarov, who plays the film’s hero, Agent Aleksei Smolin, said that the movie was meant to earn new respect for the FSB, the army and the police. These upright, uniformed figures “give us something to be proud of.” Promotional phrasing from the distributor, Top Line, often echoed the same thinking.

On this issue of theme, the resulting, key dilemma is whether “Countdown” does or does not wish to be seen as original, i.e., whether it draws happily and overtly upon

Western models, such as “Die Hard” (John McTiernan, 1988), or is perhaps more intent upon forging a path into new, yet equally noisy territory. The answer is most evident in the film’s last twenty seconds. As a final, sweeping aerial scene fades to black, replete with executive aircraft and billowing clouds, the following text appears before us:

This story is based upon real events: the life of Russian SAS officer Aleksei Galkin. After being imprisoned by Chechens, he continued his army service and was awarded the medal “Hero of Russia.” Today, together with Galkin, each and every one of us continues the battle with terrorism. A battle we must win!

Possible though it often is to forgive Russian drama its patriotic bent of late by reminding ourselves of similar flag-waving in American TV and cinema, these three sentences go far beyond the pale. As a result, what appears to be a very straightforward, knockabout action film suddenly and most willingly ushers in a crowd of ugly bystanders, shuffling in grey suits on the edge of the film set.

The finger-wagging of this audience-oriented riposte might remind us of similar closing generalizations from other adventure stories like *Zvezda* (“The Star,” N. Lebedev 2002), in that both movies draw upon the dignity of past battle in the name of another, more recent “conflict.” Both hope to take a past patriotism and reinstate it. The closing lines of “The Star” are as follows. They conclude the tragic bravery of army scouts, sacrificing their lives in 1944 near the Polish border in order to send a radio message to

HQ - and thus avert a potentially devastating counterattack from several armored divisions of the German army:

Only in 1964 were the scouts of the Soviet army awarded the Order of the Patriotic War: First Degree (Posthumous). And today, each spring in May, the souls of the fallen strive once more to reach the blossoming fields of their homeland from Polish, Czech and German grassland. They strive to reach the nation for which they gave their lives.

In “Countdown,” the cost and pathos of a concrete military invasion have been conflated with, i.e., replaced by the demonized, undemanding scapegoat of “international terrorism.” Given the obvious use of physical, armed conflict as one way in which to make themes of Fascism and militant “Islam” look similar, there then emerges the issue of which style to adopt, since stories of anger per se are unlikely to sell many tickets.

When *Zvezda* was reviewed on the pages of “Variety,” some of its patriotic spectacle was attributed to plagiarism from “Saving Private Ryan” and “Jurassic Park” (1993),⁴⁹ even though most of the special effects are direct visualizations of phrasing in the base-text, Èmannuil Kazakevich’s story of 1946.⁵⁰ Something Soviet and something Californian walked hand in hand, to both political and fiscal benefit. They recognized each other, yet remained distinct.

“Countdown,” however, is much more a tale of increased sameness, of homogenization. Middle Eastern terrorists, for example, are shown duping Chechen rebels, so that viewers may lump all anti-state terrorisms into one basket, dismissed tidily

as the product of an angry Islam - and thus fall into the comforting arms of Putin and Karimov's contemporary politicking, which allows Bush to announce that all terrorists or their ideologies simply "hate freedom." Apparently it's that simple, so that everybody can agree, whether or not the Americans keep their airbase.

Not only does this film embody a woeful number of policy-driven, American stereotypes, but given the state funds with which it was made, it also spends too much time reflecting Putin's career or plans within the G8. "Countdown" uses London as the home for an émigré arch-enemy Pokrovskii (i.e., Boris Berezovskii), scheming with ill-gotten Jewish gains from his well-funded hideout. Neither Pokrovskii nor the Chechen rebels, shown in an awfully manipulative reworking of the Dubrovka and Beslan tragedies, is not the real enemy, however. Though both oligarchs and rebels lie beyond the Russian mainland, the real problem is thankfully dressed up as a Bin Laden look-alike, just in case we missed the point.⁵¹

These "Arabs," using a Moscow circus siege to keep the FSB busy, plan to fly a container of plutonium over Rome, during the G8, and explode it, creating a dirty bomb of epic proportions. If the plane flies below 3,000 meters, it will detonate, thus repeating the dramatic tension of "Speed" (Jan de Bont, 1994). Putin's words and shady off-screen presence, employed on at least three occasions in the film, make it clear that the cargo plane will not be allowed to leave Russian airspace. Despite overt references to the risk of a "second Chernobyl" in the screenplay, the idea of destroying the people of Russia and Belarus to save Italians and a handful of foreign dignitaries does not appear to trouble anybody. Similar self-sacrifice is perhaps supposed to hark back to archetypes *à la* "Star," but it smells very different. The *Daily Telegraph* last year quoted a Top Line

executive as saying “Countdown” was supposed to show “Russia as a country that’s ready to become a part of Europe.”⁵² And yet it needs Central Asian solidarity to do so; it needs to clarify where Termez ends and disorder starts.

One of the film’s producers, Sergei Gribkov, defined this goal of as the depiction of “both external and internal terrorism. People must see even those things that might be uncomfortable for them to think about.”⁵³ If the complexities of international terrorism are boiled down to a simple opposition of good and bad, there’s no real problem; heaven knows that James Bond hardly did justice to geopolitical intricacy in the past. When, however, a government starts funding “blockbusters” and is then pampered early on with its own closed screenings (no doubt of editorial consequence), one starts to feel uneasy.

The rather angry, binary presentation of Gribkov’s “uncomfortable truth” seems less like entertainment and more like the militaristic rant of Jack Nicholson in the closing scenes of “A Few Good Men” (Rob Reiner, 1992). “Countdown” knows very clearly what it wants to say, and does so with force in its closing on-screen text. What it does not know, however, is to whom it speaks, whether to Western, domestic or governmental audiences, and therefore the issue of how becomes muddled. “Countdown” in its casting, for example, makes a few strange nods in the direction of more liberal, Western motifs, such as a savvy, rugged female journalist (Louise Lombard) or a high-ranking Black dignitary (John Amos), yet both these stereotypes look very misplaced on a Russian screen. “Countdown” is an extreme example of where state-run television is placing its faith and funds when it comes to action. International policy may dream of future gains on overseas screens, but much of what we see revolves around saving a domestic cultural heritage that was until recently being lost. If that heritage involved fraternal relations

between two or more nations (if only rhetorically), what of brotherly cinema in Uzbekistan itself?

Uzbek Examples of an Associated Nostalgia: *Boys in the Sky*

Boys in the Sky 2 (Osmondagi bolalar 2) is the 2003 sequel to Zulfiqor Musakov's comedy of the same name; both films have enjoyed enormous success in Uzbekistan, filling Tashkent theaters for months on end.⁵⁴ At the sequel's premiere, four times the number of allocated viewers turned up; seats, doors, and windows were broken. The director feared that the floor would collapse under the weight of unexpected bodies. He, as his young actors, cannot now walk freely around Tashkent, hounded by young people who have seen this movie almost ten times and know the screenplay verbatim. Uzbek films, in fact, today account for 90% of domestic distribution (though this is partly due to the slower translation of American films into minor languages).⁵⁵

Fiscal accomplishment on this scale, not surprisingly, is the result of a straightforward and simple plot. Four Tashkent boys wrestle with the difficulties of school, family, and the opposite sex, in particular a new arrival in their class, Lola. The boys already have their own crosses to bear, thrust upon them by their fathers, who range from the professionally or sexually frustrated to the downright booze-sodden. Lola's beauty and disarming confidence further complicate the boys' awkward efforts at self-definition, especially when she foils an after-school ambush with a few well-placed blows to their testicles.

Rumors abound that Lola is soon destined to leave Uzbekistan for London, but not before the male quartet has fallen head over heels for her worldly manner. She does

eventually emigrate with her parents, and this distance is maintained in the sequel; Lola is now a newly-wed young woman, while the boys have begun to enter the world of their fathers, as trainee bankers, medical students, drafted soldiers, or fledgling professional athletes. Comedy here is maintained through the same combination of slapstick and generational disparities; Western viewers will recognize many staples from the coming-of-age genre. In the second film, for example, a high-end Mercedes is almost totaled by a wayward son, redoing the same accident with a Ferrari 250GT from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (dir. John Hughes, 1986). The American publication *Variety*, in fact, went as far as calling this pre-pubescent humor a “sort of *Uzbek Pie*, but chaster than its US template.”⁵⁶ The journal *Kinoforum* picked up on this reference, extending it to the hit youth comedy of 2002, Denis Evstigneev's *Let's Make Love (Zaimemsia liubov'iu)*.⁵⁷ Other Russian critics discerned a similarly international appeal, albeit with greater condescension: “The film creates a recognizable image of average people in Central Asia - of life today in the middle of nowhere.”⁵⁸

The potential universality of the movie was - on happier terms - defined further by Musakov: “It's a poetic and lyrical film about the love of four boys for one girl. It's all about their first [experience of] betrayal, about their friendship.”⁵⁹ Viktor Erofeev, heading the *Kinoshok* festival jury of 2003, saw another commonality (somewhat oddly) in the “happy” truth that Uzbek kids “like *Coca-Cola*, too.”⁶⁰ Reports in the Uzbek press record several requests to the director that he even consider turning these two films into a (much longer) TV series, since - at long last - national cinema is managing “without shoot-outs, blood, and cruelty.”⁶¹ It is offering what everybody wants, no matter where they live.

Musakov's sense of comedic drama indeed comes less from quintessentially American violence than the emotional bruising of tween-age maturation. He frequently shoots from behind the film's various authority figures, recording the tragicomic damage done to youngsters; he also tends to position events of genuine anguish or worry in adjoining rooms, seen through a doorway or window. We, along with boys "everywhere," are rarely afforded a full, objective view of how or why adult events happen.

This deliberately constricted focus is extended to outdoor scenes. One of the peculiarities of *Boys in the Sky* is its overriding air of peace and quiet - the extent to which it avoids the noise of others. In most of the street scenes there is little evidence of city crowds or traffic. Small groups of clumsy interaction are placed against sun-bleached walls or empty thoroughfares. Correspondingly, the most enduring metaphor across both films is that of an empty tram - a tiny social bubble that drifts with no more than one or two adolescent passengers.

The use of incidental music is likewise minimal, despite brief snippets from The Beatles, Sting, and Michael Jackson; Musakov floats his four boys, to borrow our Russian complaint from above, in the middle of nowhere. This is not immediately apparent, especially given the general clowning around and physical humor of the first film. When the sequel, however, continues to keep the boys at arm's length from Tashkent's hubbub, Musakov's simplicity appears more purposeful. The structural plainness that won over so many Uzbek families starts looking less off-hand and more deliberate. Sounds and objects are missing; once again we sense a story of loss.

This willful minimalism serves to counterbalance the large number of overt cinematic references in both films. Musakov's prime audience of Asian teenagers might find cause for occasional giggling at erudite references from the mouths of such young protagonists, but the use of Von Trier, Rohmer, Kitano, Tarkovskii, Kustrurica, Chaplin, and Lloyd prompts older viewers in no uncertain terms to look below the sunny surface of box-office jollity. This prompt is especially clear when one considers how the boys use the work of these directors to take refuge from the bad storytelling of others, both from their fathers' shameful biographies and the brainless blockbusters of Van Damme and Jackie Chan (which they simply refuse to rent).

The Language of Uzbek Cinema's Lost Bonds

At the end of the first film, the empty tram is used by one of the boys to escape the misery caused by his father's philandering, but he is forced to leap from isolation back into the world when he sees his grandfather's wheelchair stuck in the rails ahead. It is this theme of responsibility for one's elders that is presented through the filter of Western cinematography. Issues of generational conflict are cause for laughter in the first movie, but become increasingly serious in the second. They serve to make several (unfunny) observations about responsibilities for one's Fatherland, too, because Lola's departure for London is not depicted sympathetically. The fact that her emigration is orchestrated to a song by folk diva Sevara Nazarkhan (who has stayed in Uzbekistan) reminds us of a similar overlap in the airborne scenes of Petr Todorovskii's *Intergirl* (*Interdevochka*, 1989). Lola will later discover that her young husband is less than faithful, but in part her decision to leave home for a world of looser morals remains

precisely that—her decision.⁶² Lola’s love has abandoned those who needed it most at home.

Heart attacks and ailing grandfathers in the sequel remove even more emotional support from the boys. This isolation of Musakov’s characters may have served what one Russian reviewer called a “utopian reality” in the funnier first film,⁶³ but it becomes a burden in the second. A couple of respected elders have a most telling discussion about dinosaurs that died out because “they couldn’t adapt to a new climate.” Again the foursome will be left alone. This is a developmental challenge that faces four friends, no longer drifting across the dreamy skies of youthful yearning but very much stuck with both feet on the ground floor of adult life.

All they can do is rely on one another. Any resulting metaphors of caring, sympathetic ties between contemporaries may sound a tad Soviet (*à la* “*Druzhba narodov*”), and indeed several reviews maintain that Musakov here is treading some familiar ground of perestroika moviemaking.⁶⁴ In the winter of 2003, a few months after the release of *Boys in the Sky 2*, I conducted an interview in Tashkent with Tursunbay Khalikov, Deputy Chairman of *Uzbekkino* to discuss the hit comedy *Giant and Shorty* (*Dev bilan Pakana*; dir. Dzhakhangir Kasymov, 2004). With reference to this issue, he explained the emotional, centrifugal types of social membership that have been promoted by Central Asian film. Khalikov believes that in large part this “traditional” aim of Uzbek cinema originated in Bollywood, given the emotional, if not bathetic emphases of Indian screenplays. Uzbek film likewise shows “how our people are very sensitive or sensual [*chuvstvennye*]” in the way they engage the world, to the point where Tashkent

animators prefer to manufacture cartoons without reliance upon the “virtual” tools of computers, as “technology often means the loss of both national color and cordiality.”

Musakov has said that his comedy draws directly upon memories of a Soviet childhood, and many of the Uzbek reviews, like Khalikov, have drawn upon an occasionally antiquated rhetorical flourish. “Boys will be boys. They all go through a similar maturation, but that doesn’t stop them being kind and pure, like the cloudless blue sky of late summer.”⁶⁵ This type of phrasing is born of prior decades, as is the interpretation of Musakov’s childhood by the Tashkent press; similar stories of care, attention, and universal “cordiality” were always a supposed alternative to progressive or jingoistic rant (yet could be easily dragged back into policy-making).

A quick look at Uzbek scholarship of Musakov’s youth illustrates the prevalence of this style and why *Boys in the Sky* is suffering accusations of faux-romantic *sovkovost’*, of some self-orientalizing tradition scribed across an “endless [Bukhara] sky and endless sun... [across] the radiant, blue sky, with its hot, burning sun.”⁶⁶ Uzbek audiences of the Thaw, for example, were informed that if a director or screenwriter does not understand or sympathize with the world of children, his films for younger viewers will always be destined for failure.⁶⁷ Tashkent cinema likewise hoped to promote this open-armed sentiment with the inclusive polyphony of incidental music, again like Bollywood, all of which would make any forward-looking assessment of “progressive” filmmaking meaningless (or so the story went).⁶⁸

Central Asian socialist cinema, said its disconcertingly jovial advocates, made synthetic use of various forms in order to “unearth the fire in a human soul ... that is striving to ignite viewers’ hearts.”⁶⁹ This kind of declaration - here a quote from

Beethoven - advertised a cultural endeavor mapped out with acts of inclusion and addition. The ensuing challenge of inclusion in everything did not, however, lend itself to easy explication, said Uzbek scholars; the secret to an audience's respect, love, and fidelity is always elusive.⁷⁰ Metaphors of childish kindness thus slid in and out of effable policy.

Authors insisted even at the outset of perestroika that kindly Asian cinema would be a wonderful encapsulation of "international" Soviet art(s), yet would not lose any sense of national or social specificity.⁷¹ It would not resort to an "injurious and phony representation of [some bounded, mapped and] national specificity, to unquestionable dogma." The result was an intensely lyrical synthesis, both national and international, a "system where all elements are profoundly interrelated, interwoven, interpenetrating, and in a state of endless development."⁷² At its outset, *Boys in the Sky* reflects and continues this sappy socialist custom of purportedly boundless inclusion.

Paradoxically, however, it is also here - amid these parallels with Uzbek storytelling before 1991 - that the accusations of Musakov's Sovietness *founder*. Even if one claims that he colors roseate, sentimental scenes with certain elements of a more realistic late-1980s *chernukha* (such as an awful prison term given to one of the boys), Musakov's goal, which he hoped would be reached "without didacticism," lies outside the explicit use or rejection of policy. It is among the *cinematic* references that he positions the more complex, profoundly un-Soviet, and unfunny intentions of this "comedy."

Leaving Fraternal Policy (In Order to Reassess It)

Politics aside, one of the more condescending complaints about *Boys in the Sky* concerns overexposed lensing. This most provincial failure of an outdated aesthetic, with its bright cloudless sunshine and blurred palette, tends to whitewash the screen in the same way that our protagonists float in the unpeopled spaces of Tashkent. Their social spheres are made chromatically simple, as are the initial building blocks of their story. When, however, the timeframe of their four tales is stretched into young adulthood and *Boys in the Sky 2*, these uncomplicated blocks become both increasingly isolated and sadder. They become detached and fragmentary, unable to bridge a long story with clarity. The director himself has admitted that the sequel is “not a direct continuation” of the initial tale. The importance of these failures, of alleged loss, can be explained through the director’s cinematic allusions, both within these two comedies and from his earlier work.

First of all, considering that Musakov’s *Abdulladzhan* (1991) was dedicated to Steven Spielberg, we might suggest that these four boys embody nothing more complicated than a conflict of youthful innocence with some ominous threat - the basic workings of *E.T.* (1982) or *War of the Worlds* (2005), say. That threat, however, is best understood not through vague nationalism or warmed-over socialism (as spoiled by Lola), but through the other reference-point of *Abdulladzhan*: Tarkovskii’s *Stalker* (1980).⁷³ Musakov leaves his boys in a simplified radiance *so* bright and *so* overexposed that it no longer looks like the skies of sunny Tashkent, but a disturbing, borderless luminosity to match the flat tonal range of *Stalker*’s “Zone.” Our Uzbek boys are nowhere in particular; this is a broader domain than anything international. Even the final scene of the sequel does not help us to chart their location or future with any

confidence. Lola approaches the banker's son (Bakhtiar, played by Musakov's actual son); he is now a lowly mechanic, following his father's loss of employment, and he turns around to see Lola in an empty car park. Neither character is smiling.

The weeping colors born of overexposure and the director's increasingly fragmented, retrospective plot have been likened by a couple of reviews to Fellini's *Amarcord* (1974) and indeed this is the core reference for Tashkent's cinema-savvy youngsters. Left with nothing in today's car parks, the director looks back at a few lonely faces, isolated in anchorless spaces, each no bigger than Rimini. Musakov's emphasis upon mid- and long-distance shots forces us, as in *Amarcord*, to watch how these miniature, directionless social groups both fail in the present and remake themselves only emotionally - in an evanescent childhood. Melodramatic though it may sound, the sometimes hammy humor of the first film even begins to look like a quiet, studied series of parallels between the dangerous timeframe of *Amarcord* and the current political climate in Uzbekistan.

Boys in the Sky may be just two movies full of pop-culture references that allow Erofeev to see Asian kids "happily" drinking the same *Coca-Cola* as him. Fellini's film is full of a similar jollity, too: Musakov employs Chaplin and Lloyd, while the Italian makes use of Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, and Gary Cooper. Musakov's sentimental retrospection may likewise resemble either the international yearnings of a post-Soviet state film industry or even an "old-school" desire to abandon policy altogether. Given, however, the screenplay's constant, explicit use of film history, *Boys in the Sky 2* can work perfectly well as a trouble-free comedy on the visual plane, whilst making some very sad, Spielbergian observations on the textual - about the irreversible loss of

innocence to cruel civic institutions. Musakov places innocence under considerable strain when the boys walk by a cinema billboard advertising von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) and end up hiding away in a "private," prematurely adult showing of *Emmanuelle* (dir. J. Jaeckin, 1974). It remains only to see if Musakov will indeed make a third film - and whether Lola will smile at Bakhtiar. If she does not, Karimov may be to blame. Perhaps Putin. Most likely, both of them, working on the same awkward, stately harmonies in Central Asian locales, either side of the Termez Bridge.

Samarkand has been drawn upon for many feature films, all the way from Germany to Iran, and these include the beloved Brezhnevian comedy of Aleksandr Seryi and Georgii Danieliia, *Gentlemen of Fortune* (*Dzhentel'meny udachi*, 1972). The prison-break sequence of this classic movie relies upon both the fairy-tale architecture and illogically "despotic" status of Uzbekistan in Russian minds. The laughter comes from escaping those clichés and nobody is offended. In the 2006 fantasy epic *Day Watch* (*Dnevnoi dozor*, Timur Bekmambetov), Samarkand is the secret hiding place for one of the "Chalks of Destiny" that allow the holder to not only escape, but to rewrite their history; thus fourteenth-century Timur was able to inscribe his military victories ahead of time. This film has broken all box-office records in Russia. It would appear that major filmmaking under Putin and Karimov, yearning for Brezhnev's happily "golden age of the nomenklatura," would love to get their hands on a piece of that chalk, as would some of their chosen directors. Several of their expensively or successfully scribbled tales, however, allow us to see an unnervingly dark blackboard between the lines.

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- ¹ For a fuller analysis of the film, and in particular the metaphorical importance of music, see Condee, N. "Muratova's Well-Tempered Scam," *Kinokultura* #1 (2005).
- ² Keller, S. *To Moscow, Not Mecca* (Westport: Praeger 2001), 5.
- ³ *Ibid*, 250.
- ⁴ Razzakov, F. *Nashe liubimoe kino o voine* (Moscow: Èksmo 2005), 263.
- ⁵ Davis, M. "Uzbek Crisis Poses Dilemma for US," *BBC News* (16 May 2005): news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4552463.stm
- ⁶ Whitlock, M. "US Senators Push for Uzbek Probe," *BBC News* (29 May 2005): news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4591737.stm
- ⁷ "Khlopkovaia revoliutsiia?" *Ua.Com* (19 June 2005): www.from-ua.com/politics/42888a3736408/view_print/ and "Siloviki shturmovali zdanie administratsii Andizhana," *Korrespondent* (13 May 2005): www.korrespondent.net/display_print.php?arid=121386
- ⁸ "N'iusmeikery," *InoSMI.Ru* (1-7 June 2005): www.inosmi.ru/translation/220388.html
- ⁹ "Miately v Andizhane: Podrobnosti," *Baikal'skii veb-pul* (20 June 2005): babr.ru/index.php?pt=news&event=v1&IDE=22437
- ¹⁰ "Problemy SMI," *Ferghana.Ru* (14 June 2005): news.ferghana.ru/detail.php?id=3817
- ¹¹ "Uzbekistan: Perevernutaia kartina mira," *Marketing i Konsalting* (29 June 2005): www.iamik.ru/22167.html
- ¹² "Moskva podverglas' nevidannoi atake sosedei," *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (20 May 2005).
- ¹³ "Soros: Rasstreliat' demonstratsiiu v Andizhane posovetoval Putin," *Utro.Ru* (4 June 2005): www.utro.ru/news/print/2005/06/04/445383
- ¹⁴ Mil'shtein, I. "Soros iz izby," *Grani.Ru* (5 June 2005): grani.ru/Politics/Russia/p.90335.html and "Dzhordzh Soros obviniaet Vladimira Putina v krovopolitii," *Èkho Moskvyy* (4 June 2005): echo.msk.ru/news/251828.phtml
- ¹⁵ "Peskov: obvineniia Sorosa – plod ego voobrazheniia," *NIG* (19 June 2005): www.newsinfo.ru/cgi-bin/nig.cgi?id=107662
- ¹⁶ "Beschinstvuiushchie uzbekskie islamisty prosiat vmeshat'sia Rossiiu i trebuiut otstavki Karimova," *Nakanune* (13 May 2005): www.nakanune.ru/news/beschinstvujushhie_uzbekskie_islamisty
- ¹⁷ "Chto takoe Akromiia," *Izvestiia* (16 May 2005).
- ¹⁸ "Vosstanie v Andizhane i ego posledstviia," *Radio Svoboda* (21 May 2005): www.svoboda.org/11/polit/0505/11.052105-2.asp
- ¹⁹ "Andizhan zakhvachen prestupnikami," *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (13 May 2005):
- ²⁰ "Andizhan mozhnet porodit' novuiu Chechniu," *Utro.ru* (16 May 2005): www.utro.ru/articles/print/2005/05/16/438046.shtml and "Vosstanie v Andizhane podavleno, no ugli eshche tleiat," *Navigator* (16 May 2005): www.navi.kz/articles/4print.php?artid=8802
- ²¹ Preobrazhenskii, I. "Akromiia ne smogla svergnut' Karimova," *Strana.Ru* (14 May 2005): www.strana.ru/print/248066.html
- ²² "Khronika sobytii v Uzbekistane," *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (13 May 2005).
- ²³ "Karimov proinformiroval Putina o poslednikh sobytiakh v Uzbekistane," *NEWSr.com* (14 May 2005): www.newsru.com/russia/14may2005/kp_print.html
- ²⁴ See the comments by fellow star Alla Iuganova on these split roles in: "Alla Iuganova: Aktrisa," *Ruskino*: www.ruskino/person.php?folder=yuganova

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- ²⁵ “Andrei Sokolov zaputalsia v bliznetsakh,” *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* (15 January 2005).
- ²⁶ “Èlia Bolgova edva li ne utonula na s’emkakh Bliznetsov,” *Èkspress gazeta* (1 February 2005).
- ²⁷ “Khoroshuiu siuzhetinu pridumali indusy,” *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* (5 February 2005).
- ²⁸ “Mnogie geroi Bliznetsov real’ny!” *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* (10 February 2005). and “Andrei Sokolov: Skoro vy vse uznaete, kakim ia mogu byt’ podletsom!” *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* (25 February 2005).
- ²⁹ For more on previous experiences of Zinovii Roizman at *Uzbekfil’m*, see Nesterovich, V. “Bliznetsy vylechili ot nostal’gii,” (*Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 25 February 2005).
- ³⁰ “Ekaterina Guseva poimala trekh zaitsev” (*Rosiiskaia gazeta*, 23 April 2004) and “Gosti nochnogo poleta” (*Vremechko*: <http://old.atv.ru/fly/060203s.shtml>).
- ³¹ Beumers, B. “Pop-Sots, or the Popularization of History in the Musical *Nord-Ost*,” *SEEJ* 48.3 (2004).
- ³² For more on this dilemma, see Birgit Beumers’ review in *Kinokultura* #1 (2003).
- ³³ For approval of this scale *vis à vis* the film’s attractiveness, see Rostotskii, S. “Ballada o soldatakh,” *Vremia* (26 September 2005).
- ³⁴ The film is assessed as Bondarchuk’s “worthy homage to his father” in Shtutina, Iu., “Propisnye istiny Fedora Bondarchuka,” *Lenta.ru* (29 September 2005).
- ³⁵ T. Goblina, “9 rota: fil’m dlia daunov ili istoricheskaiia Pravda,” *Idushchie bez Putina*, www.noputin.ru. This article, quoted all over the web, was of particular interest to the approving Orthodox publication *Pravaia.ru* on September 30. Another, somewhat sadder way of examining this same issue is to maintain that Russia has *never* been out of war during the twentieth century. Armed conflict, therefore, becomes an unmarked state, making all tales thereof simply narratives of human behavior: Dolin, A. “Voina – mat’ rodna,” *Gazeta* (27 September 2005).
- ³⁶ Shurygin, V. “Zabytaia rota,” *Zavtra* (26 October 2005). For a nasty assessment of how, perhaps, Bondarchuk feels the loss of love felt for his family, see *Novokubanskii forum* (11 October 2005).
- ³⁷ For the story of how Bondarchuk’s crew had to work around the daily timetable of Karimov, see: Barysheva, A. and Petrova, O. “Semero smelykh,” *Versia* (30 September 2005).
- ³⁸ “Druzhba ili tolerantnost’?” www.keminfo.ru (4 November 2005).
- ³⁹ “9 rota.” Forum at www.samarkand.ru (3 October – 13 November 2005).
- ⁴⁰ Korotkov, Iu. and Gruniushkin, D. *9 rota* (Moscow: Geleos 2005), 25.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 187.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 304
- ⁴³ Korneev, R. “Afgan, kakim my ego poteriali,” *Kinokadr* (2 October 2005). Acceptance of this argument is developed fully in Fedina, A. “9 rota obespechit osennii prizyv,” *Izvestiia* (26 September 2005). The newspaper *Vedomosti* decided that the movie was purely and simply a tale of “human achievement” (Strelkov, A. “Politika na zadnem plane,” 27 September 2005). Even the usually contrary *Èkho Moskvy* held the film to be “an honest psalm in honor of Afghan and Chechen veterans.” *Èkhokino* (28 September 2005).

- ⁴⁴ “9 rota.” Forum at *Rus kino*, 9 December (2005). Other reasons for the public’s enthusiasm are in Kashirskaia, I. “O voine kak o voine,” *Film.ru* (3 October 2005).
- ⁴⁵ Barabash, E. “Tragediia ostalas’ za kadrom.” *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (26 September 2005). See also Kostylev, A. “Po tanku vdarila bolvanku,” *Gazeta.ru* on the same day.
- ⁴⁶ Kichin, V. “Po tu storonu podviga,” *Rossiskaia gazeta* (1 October 2005).
- ⁴⁷ Baranets, V. and Korsakov, D. “Fil’m Fedora Bondarchuka ‘9 rota’ – Igrushka v voinushku?” (6 October 2005).
- ⁴⁸ “Sud’ba otechestvennogo kino – Putin posetil Mosfil’m,” *Reklama-Online* (3 November 2003).
- ⁴⁹ “Zvezda / The Star,” *Variety* (July 22 2002).
- ⁵⁰ Kazakevich, È. “Zvezda.” *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1963 [vol. 1]).
- ⁵¹ “Kino i gosudarstvo: Kto kogo imeet,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (24 December 2004)
- ⁵² *Daily Telegraph* (19 July 2004)
- ⁵³ “Lichnyi nomer – novyi russkii blokba\$ter,” *Utro* (9 December 2004)
- ⁵⁴ On the changing attitudes to cinema as more “prestigious” entertainment after the success of *Osmondagi bolalar*, see “Uzbekskoe kino protiv Gollivuda,” *Kul’tura* (#22 2004). On the high standards of the sequel *vis à vis* the original, see “Mal’chiki v nebe,” *Gazeta SNG* (4 June 2004) and “Kinoshok zavershilsia,” *Vremia* (15 September 2003).
- ⁵⁵ “Uzbekskii kinobum,” *Kinoforum* #3 (2004).
- ⁵⁶ *Variety* (22 December 2003).
- ⁵⁷ “Uzbekskii pirog,” *Kinoforum* #1 (2003).
- ⁵⁸ “Radosti i pechali malen’kogo kurorta,” *Film.ru* (15 March 2004). The lack of violence is also cause for celebration in “Nemnogo solntsa v kholodnom kino,” *Kinoshock.ru* (16 September 2003).
- ⁵⁹ “Zvezdy Shakena zazhglis’ v Almaty,” *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda* (3 December 2003).
- ⁶⁰ “Kinoshok pisatel’ia Erofeeva,” *Ogonek* 36 (October 2003).
- ⁶¹ “Tashkentskie mal’chiki v Moskovskom nebe,” *Zhakhon* (4 February 2003).
- ⁶² In her 2005 article for *Kinokultura* 7, Gul’nara Abikeyeva also noted that their boys’ decision not to leave Tashkent, despite their modern, marketable skills, was of sociopolitical importance.
- ⁶³ “Kinoshok Viktora Erofeeva,” *Novye izvestiia* (15 September 2003).
- ⁶⁴ “Grud’ Dzhul’etty byla cherno-beloii...” *Zerkalo nedeli* 22 (2004).
- ⁶⁵ “Kino novogo myshleniia,” *XonAtlas* (29 October 2002), also published in *Zerkalo* 21.
- ⁶⁶ Iakubova, M. *Kak ia stala aktrisoj* (Tashkent: GG, 1984), 44.
- ⁶⁷ Aliev, M. *Kamil Iarmatov* (Tashkent: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1960), 53.
- ⁶⁸ Teshabaev, Dzh. *Kamil Iarmatov* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964), 8 or Ianov-Ianovskaia, N. *Muzyka uzbekskogo kino* (Tashkent: Fan, 1969), 155.
- ⁶⁹ Abul-Kasymova, Kh. *Shukhrat Abbasov* (Tashkent: GG, 1976), 111.
- ⁷⁰ Teshabaev, Dzh. *Rakhim Pirmukhamedov* (Tashkent: GG, 1970), 58.
- ⁷¹ Teshabaev, Dzh. *Uzbekskoe kino: poiski i nadezhdy* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznoe biuro propagandy kinoiskusstva, 1984), 48.
- ⁷² Introduction to Abul-Kasymova, Kh. *Kino i khudozhestvennaia kul’tura Uzbekistana* (Tashkent: Fan, 1991).

⁷³ The importance of Tarkovskii for Musakov is extended in “Lone Wolves at the Door of History,” *Film Comment* (May/June 2003).