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# Deconstructing Vygotsky's victimization narrative: A re-examination of the 'Stalinist suppression' of Vygotskian theory

History of the Human Sciences  
2015, Vol. 28(2) 128–153  
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0952695114560200  
hhs.sagepub.com  


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## Abstract

Although many facets of Lev Vygotsky's life have drawn considerable attention from historians of science, perhaps the most popular feature of his personal narrative was that his work was actively chastised by the Stalinist government. Almost all contemporary references to Vygotsky's personal history emphasize that from 1936 to 1956, it was forbidden to either discuss or disseminate any of Vygotsky's works within the Soviet Union. Although this 'Vygotsky ban' is both widely acknowledged and frequently cited by a variety of scholars, the exact nature of this alleged Communist party censure has received far less historical attention. Through focusing on the logistics of Soviet 'bans,' this article attempts to shed light on this historical mystery and augment the growing body of revisionist literature that serves to deconstruct the mythologized persona of Lev Vygotsky.

## Keywords

ban, censorship, the Soviet Union, victimization, Lev Vygotsky

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Although many facets of Lev Vygotsky's (1896–1934) life have drawn considerable attention from historians of science, perhaps the most commonly acknowledged feature of his personal narrative was that he was actively chastised by the Stalinist government, with his work being placed under an enforced publication ban that would persist for a period of almost 20 years after his death. References to this infamous ban pervade contemporary accounts of Vygotsky – almost all of them emphasizing that in the period from 1936 to 1956, it was forbidden either to discuss or disseminate any of Vygotsky's works within the Soviet Union. According to these narratives, it was only after Stalin's death in 1953 that Vygotsky's ideas were able to resurface in Russia, as a network of his collaborators and associates began to circulate his central tenets within the late 1950s, which is allegedly due to the first post-Stalinist era publication of Vygotsky's works in 1956.

In the most general sense, the entire corpus of literature that to a varying extent focuses on Lev Vygotsky and his scientific legacy can be referred to as 'Vygotsky Studies'. Hardly an independent field of knowledge, these 'Vygotsky Studies' are informed by and feed back to several somewhat more canonical scholarly traditions such as psychology and education, history of the Soviet Union and Russia, and history of the human sciences. There are notable differences between all these disciplinary subfields, and we are fully aware of the dangers of oversimplification, yet for simplicity's sake these will be further referred to as 'psychology' and 'history', and their agents will be described as 'psychologists' and 'historians' respectively. Thus, it might be instructive to sketch an outline of the early history of the 'Vygotsky ban' narrative as it is presented in various publications on Vygotsky, in the West and in the East. The history of the reception and the social construction of the life story of Vygotsky and his legacy has not been written yet, and such an endeavor is definitely beyond the scope of this article. Yet, we believe that some tentative generalizations are possible even at this early stage and that this article contributes to first attempts to understand the 'Vygotsky myth' as it circulates in a contemporary international context.

## Deconstructing the narrative of the 'Vygotsky ban'

Presumably the first reference to the 'Vygotsky ban' can be found as early as the first major post-Second World War English publication of Vygotsky's work. This is Jerome S. Bruner's introduction to Vygotsky's book 'Thinking and Speech' that came out under the title *Thought and Language* in 1962. Twenty years later, in his autobiography Bruner described the circumstances of his participation in this publication project: 'Then in 1961, after his official "rehabilitation" in Russia and a great deal of backing and filing diplomatically to obtain rights, his *Thought and Language* was translated into English by my colleague Eugenia Hanfmann. She asked me to write a preface' (Bruner, 1983: 139). Then, this introduction signed by its author in July 1961 in Cambridge, Massachusetts – among other fairly curious statements of interest to a historian of science – presents the following paragraph:

For an English-speaking audience it avails little to trace the ideological course of Vygotsky's work through the groundswells and storms of psychology in the Soviet Union. It was

inevitable that his work should disturb the doctrinaire guardians of ‘proper Marxian interpretation’, particularly during the period of the ‘battle for consciousness’. As two of Vygotsky’s most gifted collaborators, Luria and Leontiev, put it in 1958, introducing the German translation of his work in the *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, ‘The first and most important task of that time [the late 1920s and 1930s when the “battle for consciousness” raged] . . . consisted of freeing oneself, on the one hand, from vulgar behaviorism, and, on the other hand, from the subjective approach to mental phenomena as exclusively inner subjective conditions which can only be investigated introspectively’. It is no surprise then that Vygotsky’s *Thought and Language* should have been suppressed in 1936, two years after its appearance, not to reappear again until 1956. (Bruner, 1962: v–vi)

Jerome Bruner (born in 1915), not a historian, but a stellar human sciences researcher and a classic of American and British psychology, clearly did not have first-hand knowledge of Vygotsky or, apparently lacking reading knowledge of Russian, of his original Russian legacy and evidently owed to somebody else this information that he reproduced in his Introduction. Indeed, on another occasion, in a chapter of the book of 1985 that was based on a special ‘Vygotskian’ conference held in Chicago in 1980,<sup>2</sup> Bruner provided an account of his first encounter with the name and ideas of Vygotsky. It was in Montreal in 1954 when the first post-Second World War Soviet delegation took part in the International Congress of Psychology. As we know, the delegation included Soviet scholars B. M. Teplov, A. N. Leontiev, A. V. Zaporozhets, G. S. Kostiuik, E. N. Sokolov and E. A. Asratyan. Out of the 6 members of the delegation, it was Sokolov and Asratyan, who were (psycho)physiologists, and only the latter – the founding director of the Institute of Higher Nervous Activity in Moscow – can be described as a ‘true Pavlovian’. Bruner comments on a fairly unusual (by the standards of western academia) impression of the Russian presentations he attended in Montreal in 1954:

Their presented papers characteristically started with a genuflection to Pavlov, followed quickly by some rather interesting studies of attention or problem solving or whatever that had little to do with the Pavlov I read. They seemed to represent some other interest whose nature I could not quite discern. And then there was a classically Russian reception toward the end of the week, replete with vodka and a barrel of caviar. It was at that reception (and an informal party at Wilder Penfield’s) that I first encountered talk of Vygotsky . . . Vygotsky’s work, I learned that evening, was widely circulated, though it was officially banned. (Bruner, 1985: 22)

This encounter with the idiosyncratic ‘quasi-Pavlovian’ Soviet psychology apparently triggered Bruner’s interest in Soviet research and continued contacts between Bruner and some Russian scholars, most notably Alexander Luria – Vygotsky’s closest associate and the most ardent advocate of Vygotsky’s scholarship in the West – who was highly instrumental in the first English publication of Vygotsky’s book. Thus, according to Bruner’s reminiscences, Luria’s impact on him was quite notable, at least as far as the image of Vygotsky and his scholarly legacy is concerned:

Vygotsky’s book finally appeared in English in 1962. I was asked to write an introduction to it. By then I had learned enough about Vygotsky from accounts of his work by Alexander

Romanovich Luria, with whom I had become close friends, so that I welcomed this added goad to close study. And I read the book not only with meticulous care, but with growing astonishment. For Vygotsky was plainly a genius. Yet it was an elusive form of genius, his. (Bruner, 1985: 23)

The narrative of ban (and ‘rehabilitation’) yet another time resurfaces in Bruner’s autobiography of 1983: ‘Vygotsky published little, and virtually nothing that appeared in English before 1960; indeed, until the late 1950s, most of what he wrote in Russian was suppressed and had been banned after the 1936 purge’ (Bruner, 1983: 137). Thus, by the beginning of the so-called ‘Vygotsky boom’ in the mid-1980s the idea of a ‘ban’, or ‘suppression’, of Vygotsky in 1936–56 and his subsequent ‘rehabilitation’ seems to have been as much common knowledge about Vygotsky as it was part and parcel of the narrative of ‘Vygotsky the (elusive) genius’. This complex construct of ‘elusive genius as a victim’ triggered two – often intertwined, yet distinct – lines within ‘Vygotsky Studies’, especially those produced by authors that we refer to as ‘psychologists’ (i.e. psychologists and educationists as opposed to ‘historians’; on the latter ones see further).

The first line can be referred to by the title of the famous book by René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner *Understanding Vygotsky* (1991). Indeed, the ‘elusiveness’ of Vygotsky’s genius generated quite a number of publications attempting to understand what exactly constitutes the ingenuity of Vygotsky and what his original and distinctly ‘Vygotskian’ contribution to psychological science is. Such publications, the earliest of which appeared in the 1930s, are numerous and keep accumulating to date (see, for example, Yasnitsky, van der Veer and Ferrari, 2014).

The second line is presented by the numerous references to the ‘Vygotsky ban’ that reappear in virtually any writing that deals with the life story of Vygotsky from the 1980s onwards. One example of the reference to the ban and speculations about its causes can be found in *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind*. This is the book by James Wertsch that was partially based on the author’s conversations with Vygotsky’s daughter Gita Vygotskaya (1925–2010) in October 1981 (Wertsch, 1985: 13) and appears to be one of the first English books that mention Vygotsky’s name in the title:

A few of Vygotsky’s writings were published shortly after his death, but for political reasons a twenty-year period ensued when his work was for all practical purposes banned in the USSR. This resulted partly from the 1936 decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party against pedology, a discipline roughly equivalent to educational psychology, especially as it concerns psychometrics. . . . Other factors in the demise of Vygotsky’s official position were the conflict between some of his claims and those found in Stalin’s 1950 essay on linguistics, and the rise in the late 1940s of a form of dogmatic Pavlovianism that is now referred to in the USSR as ‘vulgar materialism’. (Wertsch, 1985: 14)

Vygotsky, a cult figure to a number of psychologists and educationalists, remained of relatively little interest to scholars outside these areas of studies and social practice. In contrast with psychologists, historians – including historians of the human sciences – until quite recently have largely by-passed ‘Vygotsky Studies’; therefore, we have a

fairly limited number of historical publications that focus on Vygotsky and his associates. Then, the historiography of human sciences is distinct from the writings of psychologists in yet another respect. Unlike those of psychologists, who produced a corpus of fairly elevated and laudatory literature, the publications of historians are notably more reserved and even, on some occasions, demonstrate quite a critical – if not ironic – attitude to the topic of their discussion. For an example of this kind of discourse see the work of David Joravsky, a noted American historian of the Soviet Union, whose paper of 1987 characteristically titled ‘L. S. Vygotskii: The Muffled Deity of Soviet Psychology’ predated his treatment of this topic in his monumental book on Russian psychology (Joravsky, 1987, 1989). Thus, describing the impact of Vygotsky on Russian psychological scholarship, Joravsky made an astute and fairly scorching observation that

He laid out a most ambitious program of unification [of fragmented psychologies of the day], with an ‘historico-cultural’ approach as the central feature. Though tuberculosis cut him off at a very early age, Vygotskii left prolific disciples, most notably A. R. Luria (1902–1977) and A. N. Leont’ev (1903–1979), who founded the Vygotskii school of cognitive psychology, focused on brain damage and child development. There is a great irony in that history: Preaching a comprehensive science, Vygotskii started one more school. Much of his work was actually concealed by his avowed disciples or by the censorship, or by some combination of timid disciples and fearsome censors. His major books were withheld from publication, for 40 years in one case, 55 in another. When they finally appeared, his admirers had become thoroughly specialized adepts in one or two parts of his comprehensive project, conditioned to ignore the rest. There are peculiarly Soviet features in this ironic history, but there are also striking analogies to the fate of Wundt or James among Western psychologists, who also profess reverence for founding fathers and ignore their central ideas. (Joravsky, 1987: 190–1)

And yet, despite his scholarly erudition, critical attitude and somewhat provocative stance, Joravsky interprets the life story of Vygotsky in the context of the alleged struggle between the ‘true Marxists’ (such as Vygotsky) and ‘dogmatic Stalinists’ and ultimately yet again reiterates the victimization narrative as the history of the ‘muffled deity of Soviet psychology’. A fairly similar sentiment and interpretation can be found in the work of another historian of Soviet science and a classic of this field of knowledge Loran Graham (see the special chapter on Vygotsky in Graham, 1987). In sum, as we see, regardless of their assessment of scientific legacy and theoretical impact of the work of Vygotsky and his intellectual heirs in Soviet Russia, western scholars have always tended uniformly to subscribe to the ‘Vygotsky ban’ narrative that, to the extent we can judge on the basis of anecdotal evidence, seems to have been imported from the USSR from the mid-1950s onwards through a series of informal personal exchanges and interactions between western and Soviet agents, such as Vygotsky’s closest friend and collaborator Alexander Luria, Vygotsky’s daughter Gita Vygotskaya, and the like. The ‘Vygotsky ban’ construct yet again appears in the book by van der Veer and Valsiner *Understanding Vygotsky* (1991) that remains the best and one of the most influential works in the genre of ‘intellectual biography’ of Vygotsky to date. It seems that only the new, forthcoming book in this genre will significantly reassess this age-old account of

Vygotsky's life and scholarly legacy (Yasnitsky and van der Veer, in press). Interestingly enough, the traditional narrative of Vygotsky's life as it was presented and socially positioned in the Soviet Union followed a different scenario, quite distinct from the western one.

It was Bruner who – as early as 1954 in Montreal – observed the striking and unsettling ‘doublespeak idiosyncrasy’ of Soviet academic discourse. Indeed, the ‘genuflection’ to Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936) – the physiologist and for a long time the only Nobel Prize winner and citizen of the USSR that Soviet establishment and propaganda could be proud of<sup>3</sup> – was quite notable in a great many written publications and official public presentations of Soviet psychologists. On the other hand, the demonstrative idolatry of Pavlov was at the same time paralleled by a dramatically different kind of discourse of informal meetings and peer chats. Interestingly, Bruner's reminiscences of his first encounter with Soviet academic ‘doublespeak’ are remarkably mirrored in the memoirs of Francophone psychologists Jean Piaget (1896–1980) and René Zazzo (1910–95), who shared very similar recollections of Soviet ‘doublespeak’ as it was manifested in the events immediately preceding, during, or following the International Congress of Psychology in Montreal in 1954 (Piaget, 1956; Zazzo, 1982, 1989). Thus, it is important and, for all practical purposes, sufficient to distinguish between the ‘written tradition’ of the discourse of official Soviet science and its ‘oral tradition’ of informal personal networks. The two traditions generated notably distinct ‘Vygotsky narratives’ in the Soviet Union.

The official narrative of ‘Vygotsky Studies’ in the USSR was typically presented in the context of the discussion of the struggle for the truly Marxist psychology and emphasized the continuity of the tradition from Vygotsky to his ‘best students’, ‘loyal disciples and followers’, or, in somewhat militant Soviet newspeak, his ‘brethren in arms’. An integral part of this discourse was the construct of the ‘troika’ [the three] of Founding Fathers that comprised Vygotsky and his associates A. N. Leontiev and A. R. Luria. This construct was subsequently transformed into the narrative tradition of the ‘school of Vygotsky–Leontiev–Luria’ that allegedly founded the so-called psychological ‘activity theory’, its western incarnation being the so-called ‘cultural-historical activity theory’, also known by its abbreviation ‘CHAT’; for the deconstruction of this narrative and critique of its theoretical claims see the recent writings of Miller (2011) and Yasnitsky (2010, 2011a, 2012b). Naturally, no reference to any ‘ban of Vygotsky’ can be found in the Soviet ‘written tradition’ that typically presents this scholar as a ‘genius’, a ‘true Marxist’ and the Founding Father of a distinctly and characteristically ‘Soviet psychology’.

Quite in contrast to official writings (and related public presentations), the underground ‘oral tradition’ depicted Vygotsky as the victim of the oppressive regime, whose publications were banned for the two decades of the period of 1936–56. This is the somewhat dissident image that was quite popular within the ‘inner circle’ of the knowledgeable insiders in the USSR and, on the other hand, exactly the same image was actively exported outside the Soviet Union by the Soviet brokers between Russian and western academic communities, such as Alexander Luria. The sharp contrast between the two traditions was preserved until the launch of the official campaign of *glasnost* [publicity] in 1986, but the difference between the ‘official’ and ‘oral’ narratives may be said to have eventually ceased to exist only after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the abolishment of the institute of state censorship in 1991. It was only in the 1990s that the

first Russian books came out that could qualify as more or less scholarly biographies of Vygotsky, albeit none of these written by a professional historian (Leontiev, 1990; Yaroshevskii, 1993; Vygodskaya and Lifanova, 1996). For obvious reasons, all these publications present fairly clear statements to the effect of Vygotsky's genius, victimhood and the ban imposed on his publications by the oppressive – yet anonymous – Stalinist regime. The notion of the 'Vygotsky ban' remains the dominant and unquestionable construct within Russian psychological discourse from the 1990s until now.

### **Why the narrative of the 'Vygotsky ban' is problematic**

Although this ban has been both widely acknowledged and frequently cited by historians of psychology, the exact nature of this 'Vygotsky censure' by the Communist Party has been far less straightforward. While the suppression of Vygotsky's works has been referenced by a variety of scholars, few individuals have been able to provide an effective delineation of the factors underlying the party's decision to openly denounce Vygotskian theory. Even the most committed scholars of Vygotskian science fail to provide readers with a detailed account of this 'official ban', collapsing this interesting instance of 'Stalinist' oppression to a one-line-long anecdote. These authors also fall short in illuminating the reasons behind the ban, often falling victim to the age-old (and largely inaccurate) cold war era historiographical heuristic of Soviet science that insinuates indiscriminate Stalinist hostility towards scientific research. Capitalizing on the explanatory power of totalitarian catchphrases, these writers tend to perpetuate ambiguous secondary accounts of the 'Vygotsky ban' – often speculating that 'ideological disparities', or 'political differences', between Vygotsky and the Communist Party probably played a role in the censorship of his works, despite the corpus of recent research that points out the many problems with applying the 'state-suppression' model to Soviet science.<sup>4</sup> Those authors who resist the temptation to rely on the explanatory power of 'totalitarianism' in order to explain away the ban often fall back on a variety of other well-known, but grossly over-simplified, historical 'truisms', frequently hypothesizing that the 'Vygotsky censure' might have somehow stemmed from Soviet anti-Semitism, or Vygotsky's alleged 'cosmopolitan'<sup>5</sup> sympathies. Although political differences, an ideological departure, religious discrimination, or frequent communication with foreign psychologists may have certainly contributed to his censure, a rote listing of these broad factors can, at best, only ever provide a partial account of any active political effort made to suppress Vygotskian theory. In light of the abstruse nature of pre-existing explanations, many aspects of this purported ban remain largely enigmatic, with the reasons underlying this 20-year censure being even more so.

In order to shed light upon this historical mystery, this article takes a closer look at the 'Vygotsky ban'. To avoid making the same mistakes as many Vygotsky biographers, and providing overly simplified versions of the censure, this article draws largely upon original Russian sources as well as English-language translations of a plethora of documentary evidence, including political pronouncements, professional publications, posthumous records, and archival studies carried out by Russian-

language researchers at the Vygotsky archive. Further, a critical attitude towards all pre-existing historical depictions of the ban has been adopted to ensure that this article does not perpetuate vague, ‘broken telephone’ accounts of this instance of ‘Stalinist suppression’. Concentrating specifically on the temporal period of 1934 (the year of Vygotsky’s death) through 1936 (the year of the notorious decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party that banned *pedology* [alias ‘paedology’] as the scholarly discipline, mass movement and related social practice, therefore, and the purported beginning of the ‘Vygotsky ban’), to 1956 (the year when the first post-Second World War Vygotsky volume was published in the Soviet Union [Vygotsky, 1956]), which signifies the beginning of the post-Stalin psychological publication ‘thaw’, this article endeavours to set the record straight about this frequently cited period of Soviet censorship by providing interested readers with the information that has long been left out of traditional narratives.

Since this 20-year period of Stalinist censure has been widely cited, but rarely described in sufficient depth by Vygotsky scholars, this article continues by describing the organs of Soviet control over information in the attempt to describe what exactly is meant when the term ‘ban’ is employed by historians of science. By illuminating the institutions affiliated with the censorship process, the mechanisms through which written works were censored by the state, and the types of individuals that were subjected to this very public – yet not necessarily publicly advertised – form of blacklisting, the next section of the article operationalizes the term ‘ban’ and discusses exactly how an author’s writings could be ‘actively suppressed by the state’ in Russia during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. After explicating the methods by which Soviet writers and scientists could be banned during the Stalinist era (and, in fact, all subsequent political eras until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991), this article then undertakes a critical examination of the documentary evidence that is usually cited by contemporary biographers as proof of the Stalinist ‘ban’ placed on Vygotskian theory. Focusing especially on those sources that have traditionally been either ignored, mischaracterized, or misunderstood by contemporary historians of science, this section will consider official Soviet regulations, trends in Vygotsky’s personal publication rate, and references to Vygotsky’s work in Soviet psychological treatises. By focusing on the logistics of *how* Vygotsky was allegedly banned, and also, perhaps more importantly, *why* this 20-year-long period of censure was initiated in the first place, this article endeavours to correct a historical narrative that has been so frequently mischaracterized by historians of science, and to augment the growing body of revisionist literature that serves to deconstruct the mythologized persona of Lev Vygotsky and his even more mythologized scientific legacy.

## Operationalizing ‘official’ bans: The mechanics of Soviet censorship

Although this article was inspired by the inability of contemporary historians to provide a satisfactory answer to the question of why Vygotsky’s works endured a 20-year-long period of suppression within the Soviet Union, preliminary research into this issue suggested that this was not the only question that had been left unanswered within existing

historical narratives of the Vygotsky ban. Not only have historians failed to provide readers with detailed, well-researched reasons for the ban's implementation, but there is also a startling absence of any sort of information on what exactly an 'official ban' was, or the mechanisms underlying this protracted period of state-supported censorship. Before we can provide a comprehensive account of *why* Vygotsky was banned, it is imperative that we define *what* exactly an 'official ban' was, the logistics behind Soviet censorship, and the primary causalities of this form of state-supported criticism.

According to Arlen Blyum (2003), historian of Russian and Soviet literature and the leading scholar in the history of Russian censorship, by the late 1920s, the system of Soviet censorship took the form of a many-tiered control mechanism, ranging from direct dictatorial intervention to an author's own self-censorship, whereby an author molds his or her text to avoid the moral, aesthetic and other – primarily political – objections the text might encounter throughout the course of the publication process. Although the monitoring of literary and scientific works was in many ways a multi-level system, the main body of Soviet censorship was the Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs—commonly known as *Glavlit* (Ermolaev, 1997). Attached to the Nar-kompros (the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment), and later to the GPU (or security police, later renamed NKVD, then MGB, and later, infamously, the KGB), Glavlit carried out the preliminary inspection of nearly all manuscripts, as well as photographs, drawings and maps, to ensure that all written materials conformed to the *Perechen* – a top-secret series of circular letters issued by the Central Committee that listed the kind of information that should not be published in the open press because of its political or economic significance to the state (ibid.). Although Soviet censorship appears to be a top-down, unidirectional flow of power from the Politburo censors to the censored, with the Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs operating as a mediator, the Glavlit actually functioned relatively autonomously (Plamper, 2001). Rather than receiving explicit instructions from the Central Committee, Glavlit functionaries often had to reinterpret publicly issued party statements and ascertain whether these proclamations had any implications for the publishing process (Rogers, 1973; Blyum, 2003).

In order to ensure that new written materials were congruent with the *Perechen*, one of the main functions of the Glavlit was pre-publication censorship, whereby functionaries would '[filter] ten times water that was already distilled', subjecting the text, 'not only to the excision of "inconvenient parts",<sup>6</sup> but also to substantial changes and, not infrequently, to censors' additions' (Blyum, 2003:6). In addition, the Glavlit was also responsible for ensuring that all existing literary works were supportive of contemporary party policies. This type of post-circulation censorship could take several forms; however, the two most common actions taken against reactionary literary products already in distribution were removal and revision, whereby undesirable parts of products could be eliminated (e.g. the blackening of names), or entire books could be taken from library and bookstore shelves and stored in a restricted-access special collection known as the *spetskhran* (Rogers, 1973; Choldin, 1991; Plamper, 2001). Contemporary accounts of the 'Vygotsky ban' do not specify the type of censorship endured by Vygotsky's works over the course of this 20-year ban. However, if Vygotsky had been subjected to a form of blacklisting, one would expect that he, like other officially censored individuals, would have been subjected to both pre- and post-circulation censorship: his existing

works would have been removed from library shelves, and his future writings would have been denied publication.

Although censorship was commonplace within the Soviet Union, with almost every author experiencing some form of either pre- or post-circulation censorship during the 1920s and onwards, explicit party bans on individuals were far less routine. Even authors whose works showcase a variety of Glavlit insertions, deletions, or blackened portions, or were frequently denied publication by the censors, were rarely banned from publishing further, and usually faced few long-term consequences for their moral, political, or ideological literary errors. After the scouring of histories of Soviet censorship, publication prohibitions aimed towards specific individuals seem to be restricted to ‘enemies of the people’, or those individuals who had been arrested, legally condemned and executed in the public purges endemic within the Soviet Union during the 1930s (Ermolaev, 1997). Whereas the majority of pre- and post-circulation censorship efforts had few long-term consequences for authors, personal publication bans were usually the end-result of highly condemnatory statements issued by Stalin or, less often, by the highest state officials. While these statements were usually a political rally commentary or a letter to official party mass media rather than publicly issued party decrees, they likely would have been interpreted by the Glavlit as an ‘official’ publication ban. Such an example can be observed in the case of Trotsky, ‘the prophet outcast’, exiled from the Soviet Union in 1929, whose pre-existing works were placed under a publication ban in the wake of a 1932 article authored by Stalin, dubbing Trotskyism ‘the vanguard of counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie fighting against Communism, against Soviet power, and against the building of socialism in the USSR’ (ibid.: 67).

In light of this information, the authors of this article endeavoured to find any sort of party-authored document that was overtly critical of either Vygotsky’s personality or his psychological theories. Upon further research it appears that no scholar, either professional or amateur, has been able to unearth any sort of documentation authored by Stalin, or by any other leading members of the Central Committee, that explicitly mentions the name of Vygotsky, thus suggesting that Vygotsky’s work was not formally banned within the Soviet Union. Further, Vygotsky’s personal narrative makes the likelihood of an explicit ban on his work even more suspect. Given that the 1930s was a decade characterized by the Great Terror, it might seem surprising that Vygotsky lived out his last few years peacefully, dying of natural causes in 1934, while so many of his contemporary scientists were publicly arrested, imprisoned and in many cases executed. As René van der Veer aptly notes, ‘[i]n a period when people were charged and sentenced to “ten years without the right of correspondence” . . . on grounds of having planned to dig a tunnel from Moscow to Great Britain . . . the fact is that Vygotsky was [never] arrested’ (van der Veer, 2000: 5). Furthermore, one needs to remember that after his death Vygotsky’s body was buried, and has always remained, in its final resting place – Novodevich’e Cemetery – one of the most prestigious national cemeteries within the USSR, second only to the necropolis of the Kremlin Wall, which seems to indicate Vygotsky’s fairly high status within the Soviet scientific hierarchy (Yasnitsky, 2012a).

Given the lack of documentary evidence suggesting that Vygotsky was formally criticized, or personally persecuted, by Stalin, or any high-ranking members of the Central Committee, it appears as though an ‘official’ Stalinist censure of Vygotsky’s works simply never existed.

## Vygotsky's declining publication rate: Multiple meanings?

While it appears as though contemporary historians of science may have been wrong about the formal nature of the ban against Vygotsky's theories, quantitative data cited by Vygotskian biographers seem to suggest that there may still have been some type of concerted effort on the part of Glavlit functionaries actively to suppress his work. Many scholars have lent support to the Vygotsky-victimization narrative by noting a dramatic drop in Vygotsky's publication rate after his death, whereby from 1936 to 1956, none of Vygotsky's works was published within the Soviet Union. This decline is seen as strong corroborating evidence for a sustained period of Soviet suppression, as one would expect that an author's publication rate would wane in the midst of a targeted censorship program aimed towards his or her work. Although the cause-effect relationship between Stalinist censure and publication decline makes logical sense, a critical examination of the data must be undertaken before this hypothesis is accepted by historians and permanently attached to Vygotsky's personal narrative.

Even though Vygotsky's publication rate does experience a marked decline in the period from 1934 to 1956, this overarching trend is by no means linear, as fewer of his published works were released to the public both in the mid-1920s and the early 1930s; one such example being his doctoral dissertation (Vygotsky, 1971[1925]). Confusing the alleged temporality of the 'ban', Vygotsky's 1925 doctoral thesis *Psychology of Art*, although contracted for publication in November 1925 (Vygodskaya and Lifanova, 1996), was most likely barred from circulation until 1965 – when it was eventually published in the Soviet Union by the famous Russian-American linguist and semiotician Vyacheslav Vs. Ivanov – as a result of his tendency to reference several 'subversive' Soviet public figures and political leaders in his work (van der Veer, 2000). Most important among these individuals was Leon Trotsky, the Marxist revolutionary and Soviet politician, who had fallen from grace within the Soviet Union's political leadership during the mid-1920s. An enthusiastic follower of Trotsky, Vygotsky repeatedly and approvingly incorporated many of his quotations into his professional writing, including his published book *Educational Psychology* (1925) and the unfinished manuscript 'The (Historical) Significance of the Crisis in Psychology' (van der Veer and Yasnitsky, 2011).<sup>8</sup> Although Soviet editors usually censored Vygotsky's political missteps during the posthumous publication process either by removing the punctuation surrounding borrowed quotes, or by deleting citations referring to these ostracized figures, censors would sometimes withhold publication of certain works that portrayed unpopular individuals in a particularly positive light. This was most likely the case for Vygotsky's *Psychology of Art*, as he ends his thesis with this lengthy quote drawn from Leon Trotsky's well-known *Literature and Revolution*:

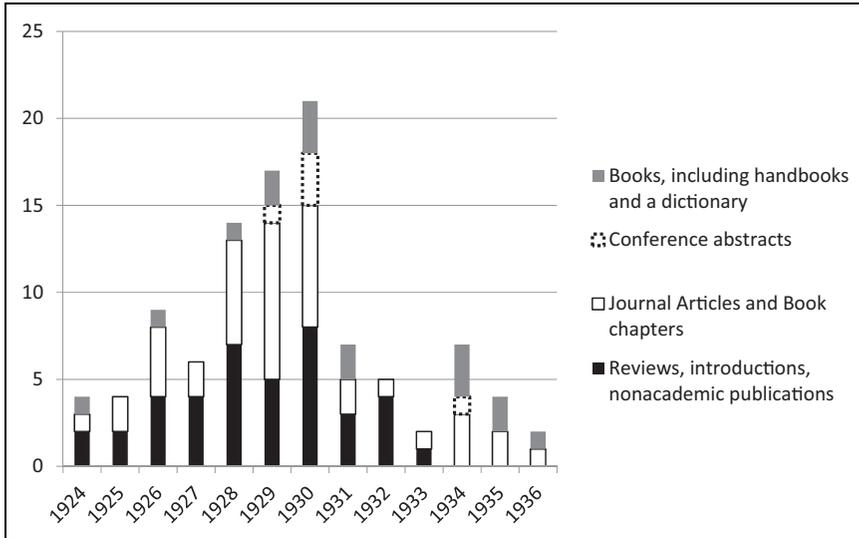
[Man] will try to master first the semiconscious and then the subconscious processes in his own organism, such as breathing, the circulation of the blood, digestion, reproduction, and, within necessary limits, he will try to subordinate them to the control of reason and will. Even purely physiologic life will become subject to collective experiments. The human species, the coagulated *Homo sapiens*, will once more enter into a state of radical transformation, and, in his own hands, will become an object of the most complicated methods of

artificial selection and psycho-physical training. This is entirely in accord with evolution . . . Man will make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman. (Vygotsky, 2008: 207)

Not only did *Psychology of Art* experience pre-circulation censorship in the 1920s, but during the 1960s it also underwent 'editorial censorship' for political correctness. All references to L. D. Trotsky, N. I. Bukharin and other 'enemies of the people' that had been discovered in Vygotsky's original manuscript were removed by the editor of this edition of 1965 (and the second, expanded edition of 1968), only to be fully restored in a 2008 Russian edition of the text (compare Vygotsky, 1965, 1968, 1971, 2008). Quite characteristically, all those censored were Russian authors, whereas the list of foreign references remained intact. Apparently the 1928 edited volume *Social Sciences* enjoyed a somewhat similar fate, as a variety of the book's contributors (including Vygotsky) made references to political 'outcasts', including a characteristically Trotskian passage found within Vygotsky's textual contribution (Vygotsky, 2012[1928]: 85–106). Thus, unlike Vygotsky's *Psychology of Art*, which remained unpublished during his lifetime, this volume was released to the public, but was subsequently censored by authorities and relocated to the *spetskhran*. Despite the fact that these two works were initially withheld from public audiences, this publication prohibition had little effect on either Vygotsky's personal life or his professional career, as Vygotsky was able subsequently to secure a variety of academic positions, and went on to have most of his writings published in spite of his reverence for highly provocative figures within the Soviet Union (Yasnitsky, 2012a; Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut, 2008).

Another complication that arises when trying to ascribe Vygotsky's publication fluctuations to a demarcated period of censorship (1936–56) is the intense decrease in Vygotsky's publication rate observed within the early 1930s, specifically between 1931 and 1933 (Figure 1). With the exception of several textbooks and curriculum materials, neither of his major works written in this period,<sup>9</sup> or before, was released to the public, and even the publication of his most famous book, *Thinking and Speech*, experienced an indeterminate delay (Yasnitsky, 2012a). This period also saw a proliferation of criticisms aimed towards Vygotsky, with individuals such as Talankin (2000[1931]), Abel'skaia and Neopikhonova (2000[1932]), Feofanov (2000[1932]) and Razmyslov (2000[1934]), critiquing his mechanism, 'menshevizing idealism' and ultimately condemning his theories for eclecticism and uncritical borrowing from the West, and thus harbouring 'bourgeois' sympathies. This period of publication rate decline and popular hostility can perhaps be partially attributed to a series of Uzbekistan experiments overseen by both Vygotsky and Luria during the early 1930s, as some contemporary scholars criticized this psychological project as colonialist and (even worse) racist, and stated that both its methodology and research results opposed Marxist theory (ibid.).

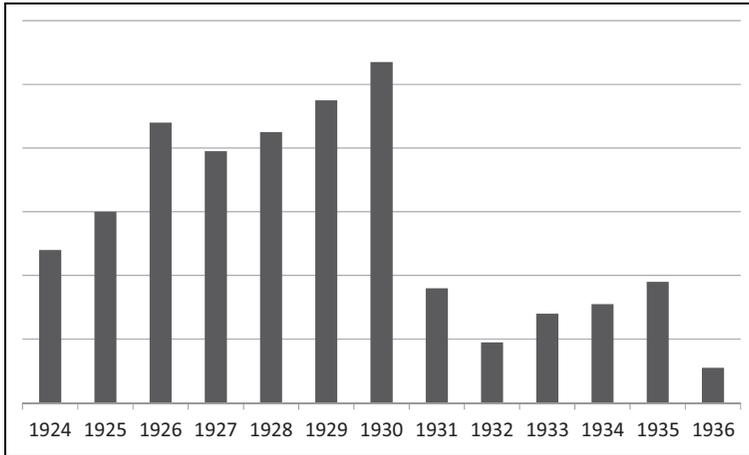
While these external critiques might have certainly played a role in dissuading Vygotsky from submitting some of his more recent studies for publication, alternative revisionist biographies of Vygotsky's life also suggest that self-criticism might have



**Figure 1.** Vygotsky's publications in 1924–36. Graphical representation based upon a critical interpretation of T. M. Lifanova's compilation of Vygotsky's bibliography (see Lifanova, 1999; Vygodskaya and Lifanova, 1996). The figures have been recalculated taking into account only actually published works.

impacted his waning publication rate during the early 1930s. These scholars suggest that during the period of 1929 to 1931, Vygotsky's career was affected by a profound theoretical and personal crisis that emerged in the wake – or rather during and, furthermore, as a result – of the Cultural Revolution and the rapid social and economic developments that corresponded with the first Five Year Plan (van der Veer and Yasnitsky, 2011; Yasnitsky, 2012a). Within this period Vygotsky was intensely critical of his work,<sup>10</sup> as evidenced in his rare official publications, private correspondence and personal records, often resulting in his failure to prepare some of his more recent manuscripts for publication, including a 1930s draft manuscript entitled 'Development of Higher Mental Functions' (Vygotsky, 1960). While this document was published by Vygotsky's colleagues in 1960, it appears as though Vygotsky never intended its public release, as it does not appear in Vygotsky's authorial bibliography of his published works, or within his self-made list of unpublished manuscripts.

Therefore, while it may be true that fewer of Vygotsky's writings were released during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fluctuations in his publication rate are by no means solely attributable to Communist Party hostility as a variety of mitigating factors all served to affect the amount of work published by Vygotsky within a given year. In fact, evidence shows that one of the biggest censors of Vygotsky's work might have been Vygotsky himself, for it is after his death in 1934 that we observe an explosion in the number of his published works. This 1934–6 surge in Vygotsky's posthumous publication rate (see Figure 1), sometimes referred to as the 'Golden Age of Vygotskian Psychology', has been attributed to the efforts of a number of his colleagues and



**Figure 2.** Publication rate of works published within the field of pedology, 1924–36. Reconstructed on the basis of Minkova (2012).

associates, who enthusiastically endeavoured to make Vygotsky's unpublished theories available to a wider public (Yasnitsky, 2011b).

While it is hoped that the aforementioned arguments have revealed the non-linear nature of Vygotsky's publication rate, and have problematized pre-existing interpretations of the 'Vygotsky ban's' temporality, the fact remains that historians of science are fundamentally correct when they state that fewer of Vygotsky's works were published after the mid-1930s; specifically, after 1936. Although this drop has been previously conceptualized as an active period of Soviet suppression, it is important to remember that this drop might be related to Vygotsky's early death in 1934. Since Vygotsky was no longer alive to actively and publicly promote his own research, it only makes sense that fewer of his works – if any – would be published after his death. Further, it should be noted that fluctuations in Vygotsky's publication rate seem to mirror the publication trends occurring within pedology, his chosen field of study (see Figure 2).

### **Pedology as a possible culprit: The 1936 decree**

Although the discipline of pedology emerged as a primarily western phenomenon, characterized by the work of individuals like G. Stanley Hall, Ernst Meumann, Wilhelm Preyer, James Mark Baldwin, and many others, interest in this growing child-study movement soon spread to Russia in the late Imperial period (Byford, 2008). Anchored primarily within the fields of psychology and education, this pioneering group of Russian pedologists, like their European and North American counterparts, drew upon the disciplines of psychology, sociology and pediatric medicine to define a new approach to the study of the character and development of children (Ewing, 2001; Petrovsky, 1990). Following the October Revolution, pedological activity assumed a new dimension, as the newly established political climate within the Soviet Union fostered child-study research efforts and advocated the reformulation of educational systems upon

materialistic, empirical and scientific foundations (Hoffmann, 2011). Disciplinary endorsement from at least three People's Commissariats<sup>11</sup> (including the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment, Health and Railways) resulted in the proliferation of pedagogical institutions that were established for the purpose of training enthusiastic teachers and advanced pedagogues in the science of child development (Byford, 2008; Petrovsky, 1990). Seeking to fulfill the claim that their discipline had both scientific legitimacy and social significance, many new graduates saw educational institutions as a site for both empirical research and practical experiments (Ewing, 2001). Charged with the task of improving Soviet schools, many of these pedagogists began to administer sets of mental and personality tests within the classroom in order to measure the learning potential of children and expedite annual enrollment decisions. Under these facilitative social circumstances, a variety of leading Soviet psychologists, educators, psychiatrists and medical doctors led by Konstantin Kornilov, Mikhail Basov, Aron Zalkind, Pavel Blonsky and a few other spokesmen for the emerging scientific discipline and social practice began to perform research into child problems, and as a result were subsumed into the administrative and organizational sphere of pedagogical leadership (Petrovsky, 1990). Vygotsky was also recognized as a leading pedagogist in the USSR, as he participated actively in the field within the 1920s and 1930s, delivering a series of pedagogy lectures at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Moscow State University and Leningrad State Pedagogical Institute, and publishing a variety of pedagogical textbooks including *Pedology of the School Age* (1928), *Pedology of the Adolescent* (1929, 1930, 1931), and *Lectures on Pedology* (1934, 1935) (Yasnitsky, 2011b).

The discipline of pedagogy did not always enjoy such a fruitful existence though, as a variety of pedagogical theories and practices came under attack in the 1930s, since many teachers and educational policy-makers thought that pedagogy was of 'little benefit to the [educational] system' (Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, 1951: 22–3). These complaints eventually culminated in the 1936 resolution of the CPSU Central Committee, 'On Pedagogical Distortions in the System of People's Commissariats of Enlightenment', which called for the elimination of pedagogy as a scholarly discipline, mass movement and social practice ('On Pedagogical Distortions in the Commissariats of Education: A Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1936' [1950]). Although there are several different hypotheses explaining this denunciation of pedagogy, the 1936 decree was mainly a methodological critique of pedagogical practice, as many party members were growing increasingly concerned that unqualified pedagogists were abusing and misinterpreting psychometric test results and over-ascribing mental deficiencies to Soviet children – a fear that is far from unjustified when one notes that in Leningrad, from 1935 to 1936, approximately 14 per cent of 7- to 13-year-old pupils were asked to stay behind to repeat their secondary school grades. Stalin appears to have been especially disillusioned with the pedagogical practice of mental testing upon his reception of a pedagogical assessment suggesting that his son was mentally deficient (Minkova, 2012). Pedagogy was also critiqued for its incompatibility with Marxist doctrine and the emerging 'New Man' theory of psychology, as Soviet leaders rejected any suggestion that heredity or environment presented limits that could not be overcome with the proper combination of enthusiasm and dedication (Ewing, 2001; Bauer, 1952). Although the 1936 decree was effective in banning mental testing

as a method of research and psychological assessment, and in virtually eradicating pedology as a scholarly discipline, with the decree immediately resulting in the closure of all pedological centers in the Soviet Union, this pronouncement did not mark the end of the child-study movement in Russia. The years following 1936 saw many well-known pedagogists change over to pedagogical practices – a growing field that shared many of the same features as its now-blacklisted predecessor. Thus, to the unbiased contemporary observer, all the 1936 party decree seems to have done is facilitate a change in labels (for the first-in-its-kind introduction to the comparative disciplinary history of Soviet psychology of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century see Yasnitsky, 2014).

Although the 1936 decree never openly gave an order for the active suppression of pre-existing literature on pedology, the public nature of this political pronouncement, and the political clout of the administrative body that issued it, inspired Glavlit officials to take pre-emptive measures, preventing the publication of recently written pedological works, and indiscriminately sanctioning all pre-existing materials that touched on pedological topics.<sup>12</sup> This ban had clear implications for Vygotsky's pedological writings, as more than 120 pedological textbooks were blacklisted at once, 'among the authors being such prominent educators and psychologists as Blonsky and Vygotsky' (Rogers, 1973: 26).<sup>13</sup> Thus, in the context of the 1936 party decree, the censure of Vygotsky's works appears to be less of an 'official' attack, or informal suppression, and more of an inadvertent result of the increasingly anti-pedological Soviet political Zeitgeist. Nevertheless, even an indirect and impersonal ban is a ban, and while we can critique contemporary Vygotsky scholars for their lack of primary-source research and for their gross oversimplifying of this particular historical instance, it appears as though we cannot fault them for arguing that, from the period of 1936 onwards, Vygotsky's works did experience a demarcated period of active suppression.

## Vygotsky's posthumous legacy and the many meanings of ban

Or can we? Although common sense tells us that an explicit party ban against Vygotsky's works, however accidental or inadvertent, would result in a marked decline in both his public image and publication rate, a closer examination of contemporary data suggests that the Communist Party ban on pedology had little impact on Vygotsky's posthumous legacy even during the years immediately following the 1936 decree.

Rather than Vygotsky's being actively chastised or strategically ignored in the years following the 1936 ban on pedology, the late 1930s saw him venerated within the Soviet Union, as his name was neither avoided nor omitted from a variety of important public forums. With the exception of two particularly harsh and, presumably, politically motivated critiques of Vygotskian theory that were released in the late 1930s, being A. V. Kozыrev and P. A. Turko's 'Professor L.S. Vygotsky's "Pedological School"' (2000[1936]) and E. I. Rudneva's infamous 'Vygotsky's Pedological Distortions' (2002[1937]), Vygotsky – as a psychologist – faced very few long-term consequences for his non-pedological work, as his name and theories were referenced (and celebrated) at various times within influential texts during the period of 1936 to 1955. Perhaps the two most striking examples of this phenomenon are (1) over 30 references to Vygotsky found within S. L. Rubinstein's 1940 edition of *Foundations of General Psychology*, and

(2) his presence within the 1940 volume of the highly prestigious (and rigorously censored) *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (Luria and Leontiev, 1940: 525). His presence in both of these works is startling as Rubinstein's book – presumably a highly censored publication that was approved, and officially prescribed by Narkompros of RSFSR as the handbook for pedagogical colleges – was subsequently the recipient of the prestigious Stalin Prize for 1941 (awarded in 1942),<sup>14</sup> which appears to have notably contributed to Rubinstein's appointment to a range of the highest administrative positions in Soviet psychological establishments (in 1942) and his election to the Academy of Sciences of USSR (in September 1943), as the first-ever psychologist in Russia awarded the title of the Academy's Corresponding Member. At the same time, the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, a multi-volume book series created with the purpose of 'furthering the aims of [both] . . . party and the state', celebrated Vygotsky's work for '[laying] the foundation in Soviet psychology for experimental investigation of the development of such most complex psychical [mental] processes as the processes of concepts formation in children, development of oral and written speech' and creating a basis 'for [the] experimental investigation of higher psychical [mental] functions after brain lesions and brain development defects' (Luria and Leontiev, 1940: 525).

Vygotsky's memory continued to be venerated well into the late 1940s and early 1950s, with his name appearing a dozen times within A. R. Luria's ground-breaking volume 'Traumatic Aphasia'<sup>15</sup> (1947). Vygotsky's work also continued to be showcased in the second, postwar edition of S. L. Rubinstein's prize-winning *Foundations of General Psychology* (1946). A characteristic example of Soviet scholarly discourse on Vygotsky and his legacy can be found in B. G. Ananiev's Russian article 'The Progressive Traditions of Russian Psychology' (1945), later republished as 'Achievements of Soviet Psychologists' as an English translation in *The Journal of General Psychology* in 1948. In this commemorative account, Ananiev – another major official in the hierarchy of Soviet science and the leader of the so-called 'Leningrad psychological school' – refers to Vygotsky's work as a series of 'splendid investigations', and notes Vygotsky's contributions to the contemporary understanding of the general laws associated with the human thought process (Ananiev, 1948: 261).

Another remarkable publication during this period is B. M. Teplov's public lecture 'Soviet Psychological Science' (1947) which was publicly released as a brochure in truly astonishing numbers, with 100,000 copies made.<sup>16</sup> Although Teplov did criticize Vygotsky for a variety of pedagogical mistakes and theoretical digressions, the lecture was ultimately favorable to Vygotsky – glorifying him as one of the leading and most prominent Soviet psychologists. Thus, on a number of occasions, Teplov referred to the 'splendid experimental research initiated by Vygotsky' (1947: 14) and 'the great many very valuable works that he created as a first-rank Soviet psychologist' (ibid.: 18); and praised him and his associates for 'several works of great significance on the problems of memory and thinking' (ibid.: 22), for creating 'original methods of experimental investigation of [higher psychological] processes in children' (ibid.) and for the 'discovery of the most interesting facts and particular regularities in this field' that were presented in a few monographs that 'belong to the number of best works of Soviet psychological science' (ibid.: 16).

However, a relatively brief period of the post-Second World War 'thaw' was followed by a period of social and political unrest in the Soviet Union from roughly 1948 to 1954

caused by a number of particularly alarming and terrifying domestic processes of the early cold war (such as the state-sponsored campaigns of xenophobia and anti-Semitism, renewed political show trials and massive executions, the enforced administrative control in science, etc.) and the change in political leadership after the death of Stalin in 1953.<sup>17</sup> This period of 1948–54 demonstrates a notable decline of scientific publications in psychology, as is clear from a number of available scholarly bibliographies of the official leaders of the psychological sciences in the USSR, such as Rubinstein, Luria, Leontiev and Teplov. However, as early as the end of 1954, the first specialized post-war psychological journal titled *Voprosy psikhologii* was officially launched and a new series of psychological publications followed.<sup>18</sup> The name of Vygotsky yet again figures prominently in a few publications and oral presentations of 1955, such as Luria's published paper 'The Role of the Word in the Formation of Temporary Connections in Normal and Abnormal Development' or his talk titled 'Speech and Organization of Behavior' that he delivered at the scientific session dedicated to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Moscow State University, 9–13 May 1955 (Luria, 1955a, 1955b).

Then, according to the traditional 'suppression' narrative, it was only in 1956 that the mythical 'Vygotsky ban' was finally lifted. In 1956, the newly established journal *Voprosy psikhologii* published a landmark paper by the journal's deputy editor V. N. Kolbanovskii, former director of the Institute of Psychology in Moscow (in 1932–7), the editor of the first Russian publication of *Thinking and Speech* (1934), and, according to A. N. Leontiev's recently published 'oral history' reminiscences of early 1970s, an enthusiastic supporter of Vygotsky's ideas (Leontiev, Yaroshevskii and Sokolova, 2013: 10). This important paper, titled 'On Psychological Views of L. S. Vygotsky' (1956), was the first postwar thematic journal publication on Vygotsky and his scientific legacy that had Vygotsky's name in its title. Eventually the first major postwar publication of Vygotsky's work took place: his *Selected Psychological Investigations* was publicly released in Moscow during 1956, followed by yet another volume of his *oeuvre* in 1960 – in retrospect, yet again severely problematizing the notion that Vygotsky's works experienced any sort of active suppression within the 20-year period of 1936 to 1956. This conclusion necessitates a reframing of our original research question, as the issue at hand is not so much a question of *why* Vygotsky was suppressed, but *if* he was 'banned' at all. While the answer appears to be 'yes' – as a recently discovered 1961 edition of the top-secret government document *Perechen* reveals that a couple of works of Vygotsky's, including yet another of his 'Trotskyist' works of the mid-1920s, the *Pedagogical Psychology* of 1925, were in fact 'blacklisted' (even after and, for that matter, regardless of the publication of the first two postwar volumes of his works!)<sup>19</sup> – this study suggests that there is still much to be learned about what it meant to be 'banned' within the Soviet Union. Despite the fact that some of Vygotsky's works do seem to have been on a list of 'officially' banned works, the personal, professional and posthumous consequences of the alleged 'Stalinist suppression' may not have been nearly as dramatic as contemporary historians of science have portrayed them. Consider the following example.

Between the publication in 1960 (Vygotsky, 1960) and the release of the first volume of Vygotsky's *Collected Works* in 1982 (Vygotsky, 1982) only one of his books came out

in the Soviet Union. Vygotsky's *Psychology of Art*, published in 1965 by Iskusstvo [The Art] publishers, was prepared for publication, edited and extensively commented on by a non-psychologist – Soviet linguist and semiotician Vyach. Vs. Ivanov (Vygotsky, 1965).<sup>20</sup> The editor of the book in Soviet academic circles had a reputation of a brilliant young scholar, yet a dissident, who in 1958 had been fired from Moscow State University for his public support of Boris Pasternak's banned-in-the-Soviet-Union Nobel Prize-winning novel *Doktor Zhivago*, his friendship with its author, and the intense scientific and personal contacts with Russian-American linguist Roman Jakobson. Given the rarity and scarcity of the Soviet-period publications of Vygotsky, one might assume that publishing the works of this author was a virtually impossible matter, especially for a scholar of relatively lower administrative rank and somewhat suspicious political standing. However, it was only three years later, in 1968, that the second, expanded edition of this volume – including Vygotsky's 'Psychology of Art', a large scholarly essay on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* of 1916 (the author's first known major written work), and a 60-pages-long editor's commentary – came out, from the same publishing house and yet again under the editorship of Ivanov (Vygotsky, 1968). Apart from an 8-page Preface to the book signed by the name of A. N. Leontiev no trace of a psychologist's involvement can be detected in this publication.

In order to problematize yet further the notion of suppression as it applies to Vygotsky and his scientific legacy, one might wonder why the 6-volume collection of Vygotsky's works did not come out in the Soviet Union immediately after it was sanctioned for publication by the state authorities in 1966 when the preparation of this publication started in the late 1960s.<sup>21</sup> Although a number of the highest administrative positions in science were occupied by Vygotsky's former associates and, from a theoretical standpoint, Soviet psychology appears to have been dominated by A. N. Leontiev's so-called 'activity theory', the collected works of Vygotsky did not come out until after the death of a number of official 'followers of Vygotsky' that were in power such as A. R. Luria (in 1977), A. N. Leontiev (1979) and A. V. Zaporozhets (in 1981).<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, fairly interesting and thought-provoking testimonies can be found in 'oral tradition' accounts by the noted Russian intellectuals and scholars Georgii Shchedrovitskii (1929–94) and Vladimir Zinchenko (1931–2014) – contemporaries and direct participants in those events of the 1950s–80s – whose reminiscences were published in the early 2000s (Shchedrovitskii, 2001; Zinchenko, 2003).<sup>23</sup> According to Shchedrovitskii, the publication of the first post-Second World War volume of Vygotsky's works took place in 1956 as a result of the effort of Vygotsky's family (that included his widow and two daughters) rather than his former students and associates, who reportedly even hindered this publication. Shchedrovitskii, who was at that time employed by the specialized publishing house under the auspices of the Academy of Pedagogical Science of RSFSR, unambiguously stated: 'Soon, to my great surprise, I realized that not only the enemies of Vygotsky, but primarily his closest disciples were doing their best to ensure that his work would not come out.' Thus, for instance, Shchedrovitskii reminisced about Luria's and Leontiev's resistance to his initiative to publish the works of Vygotsky in the late 1950s and, presumably, the 1960s. One episode is particularly telling.

The publication of Vygotsky's volume of 1956 triggered the proposal of a follow-up volume of Vygotsky's works, and yet again neither of the two – Leontiev and Luria – did

anything to interfere with the ritualistic critical ‘public discussion’ of Vygotsky’s legacy orchestrated at the Institute of Psychology in Moscow that, according to Shchedrovitskii, was apparently designed to officially denounce Vygotsky and dismiss this proposed publication project altogether. It was only due to the active public intervention of some other individuals including Shchedrovitskii, Zaporozhets and several others that this anti-Vygotsky campaign of the late 1950s was diverted at the very launch and the second volume of Vygotsky’s works subsequently did come out in 1960.

Similarly, Zinchenko stated that Leontiev consciously and continuously delayed the publication of the multi-volume collection of Vygotsky’s works in the 1970s. On the one hand, Leontiev insisted that the first volume necessarily required an introductory chapter that he – allegedly, the closest associate and the major intellectual heir – would author. On the other, Leontiev kept deliberately finding numerous excuses for not writing this chapter. As amazing as this story might appear, Zinchenko claimed that the opening Introduction that eventually came out under the name of Leontiev in the first volume of the 6-volume *Collected Works* of Vygotsky in 1982 was in fact penned in the late 1970s by Leonid Radzikhovskiy, a promising young psychologist and historian of psychology at that time and a well-known Russian journalist in our days. According to Zinchenko, only this ‘trick’ made it possible to launch the publication of the 6-volume series. And even that would not happen until after Leontiev’s death.

From a certain perspective, this publication phenomenon may also be seen as a suppression of Vygotskian theory – one perhaps even more dramatic and harmful to psychological science than the alleged, mythological suppression of the Stalinist period.

## Notes

1. This is an original Bruner comment.
2. We have been unable to find evidence that would confirm Bruner’s presumable participation in this conference of 1980.
3. The USSR did not have its second Nobel Prize until 1956, when Nikolay Semyonov was awarded one for his groundbreaking research in Chemistry.
4. For a revisionist interpretation of Stalinist science systems, whereby a mutually beneficial symbiosis exists between science and the state, please refer to Kremmentsov (1997); Kojevnikov (2004).
5. Although Stalin’s government did launch a political campaign against those who were seen to be ‘kowtowing to the West’, ‘cosmopolitanism’ was a condemnatory term that was introduced in Soviet ‘newspeak’ at the very end of the 1940s and was usually reserved for Russia’s Jewish population during the cold war era, as this social group was often criticized for maintaining large-scale international communication networks. The majority of written accounts of the Vygotsky ban fail to acknowledge this terminological distinction.
6. Inconvenient parts included those passages that (1) contained propaganda against the Soviet regime, (2) divulged military secrets, (3) stirred up public opinion through false information, (4) aroused nationalistic and religious fanaticism, or (5) were considered to be pornographic (Ermolaev, 1997: 3).
7. Soviet newspeak euphemism for a ‘death sentence’. See Cohen (2011: 68).

8. For a further discussion of Vygotsky's enthusiastic support of Leon Trotsky please refer to Keiler (2002); Yasnitsky (2011b, 2012a); Zavershneva (2012); Zavershneva and Osipov (2012a, 2012b).
9. The 'major works' mentioned here refer to Vygotsky's *History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions* and *Tool and Sign in Child Development*.
10. For example, in a 1931 letter to his colleague Luria, Vygotsky writes:

I am still beset with thousands of petty chores. The fruitlessness of what I do greatly distresses me. My scientific thinking is going off into the realm of fantasy, and I cannot think things through in a realistic way to the end. Nothing is going right: I am doing the wrong things, writing the wrong things, saying the wrong things. A fundamental reorganization is called for – and this time I am going to carry it out. (L. S. Vygotsky [2007] 'Letters to Students and Colleagues', *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 45: 11–60)

11. Later renamed 'Ministries'.
12. This is indicated in Zelenov (2000), where the author states that the cleansings of libraries are closely linked with the policies of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b). For example, after the Central Committee's Decree on 'Pedological Perversions in the System Narkompros'es', among the local organs of censorship a list was distributed of 121 textbooks, educational and methodical manuals on pedology, issued since 1926, all of which had to be withdrawn and relocated to *spetskhran*.
13. As aptly noted by Arlen Blyum in his *A Self-Administered Poison* (2003), the pettiness and pathological captiousness displayed by *Glavlit* officials were, very often, not in the least activated by any possible 'danger' posed by a text totally lacking in subversive intent. But that is the whole point: totalitarian censorship makes no distinction between the important and the unimportant, the material and immaterial. It seizes equally on a 'criminal', anti-Soviet text, and on a trivial misprint in a crossword or an odd turn of phrase in a translation.
14. The Stalin Prize was the highest honor that could be bestowed by the Soviet state in recognition of a single piece of work in science or culture. This award included a large monetary prize of 100,000 roubles. For more information on the Stalin Prize, please refer to Johnson (2011).
15. A. R. Luria's *Traumatic Aphasia* (1947) was a particularly prominent book within the field of psychology. Not only was it the first-ever major publication of his neuropsychological work (translated into English in 1970), but it was often informally referred to as the 'Bible' of Soviet neuropsychology.
16. This was a booklet of a popular lecture created on the 30th anniversary of the October Revolution, with over 100,000 copies published. To put the publication numbers in context: only 10,000 copies of each of the titles – Vygotsky's original 'Thinking and Speech' (1934), Rudneva's 'Pedological Distortions' (2002[1937]), or Rubinstein's 'Foundations of General Psychology' (1946[1940]) – were circulated within the Soviet Union.
17. It was only in early 1955 that the new leader of the country, Nikita Khrushchev, eventually got full control over the party and the state.
18. The official launch of the new journal was authorized by the Prezidium of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of RSFSR on 11 November 1954 (Shchedrina, 1995); the first issue came out the following year, in 1955.
19. See *Svodnyi spisok knig, podlezhashchikh isklucheniuiu iz bibliotek i knigotorgovoi seti* [Cumulative List of Books Subject to Removal from Libraries and Book Retail Stores]: part

- II, 1961; accessible online @: <http://www.opentextnn.ru/censorship/russia/sov/libraries/catalogue/>
20. Half a decade later this volume came out in English translation (Vygotsky, 1971).
  21. For various testimonies on this major publication of Vygotsky's works anticipated to come out in the second half of the 1960s or the early 1970s see Vygodskaya and Lifanova (1996). Also see recent reminiscences of these events in Goldberg (2005, 2012).
  22. To Luria's credit, though, it is absolutely necessary to point out that his endless effort and persistence in publishing Vygotsky's works in English translation outside the Soviet Union can hardly be overestimated. Also, it is worth mentioning that, according to anecdotal evidence, Zaporozhets was quite enthusiastic about Vygotsky's Russian works publication and significantly contributed to it; see discussion of Shchedrovitskii's memoirs below.
  23. The two sources – otherwise obscure and hardly accessible – are accessible online @: [http://www.consultlib.nm.ru/gp\\_jvbi.htm](http://www.consultlib.nm.ru/gp_jvbi.htm) <http://www.anleontiev.smysl.ru/vospomin/i-zinch.htm>

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