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ТЕРМИНОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ АППАРАТ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ СОВЕТСКОЙ ИСТОРИИ ПОСЛЕ СТАЛИНА

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Аннотация. Рассматривается методологическая проблема выбора терминологии для обозначения советской истории после смерти И. В. Сталина. Анализируется различие между хронологическим понятием «послесталинский период» и концептуальным термином «постсталинизм», заимствованным из философского лексикона постструктурализма и постмодернизма. Показывается, что термин «постсталинизм» позволяет фиксировать не просто хронологический переход, а качественное состояние общества, обусловленное предшествующим периодом, его внутреннюю противоречивость и циклический характер возвращения к сталинскому наследию. Особое внимание уделяется влиянию постструктуралистской методологии на изучение советской истории, в частности формированию школы советской субъективности в англоязычной историографии (работы С. Коткина, И. Халфина, Й. Хелльбека, А. Юрчака). Делается вывод о том, что выбор между понятиями «послесталинский период» и «постсталинизм» является выбором между хронологическим описанием и концептуальным анализом, а использование префикса *пост-* в исторических исследованиях свидетельствует о зрелости дисциплины, ее способности к саморефлексии и междисциплинарному диалогу.

Ключевые слова: сталинизм; постсталинизм; постструктурализм; постмодерн; послесталинский период; советская субъективность; историческая память; политика памяти.

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ТЭРМІНАЛАГІЧНЫ АПАРАТ ДАСЛЕДАВАННЯЎ САВЕЦКАЙ ГІСТОРЫІ ПАСЛЯ СТАЛІНА

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Анатацыя. Разглядаецца метадалагічная праблема выбару тэрміналогіі для абазначэння савецкай гісторыі пасля смерці І. В. Сталіна. Аналізуецца адрозненне паміж храналагічным паняццем «паслясталінскі перыяд» і канцэптуальным тэрмінам «постсталінізм». Паказваецца, што тэрмін «постсталінізм» дазваляе фіксаваць не проста храналагічны пераход, а якасны стан грамадства, абумоўлены папярэднім перыядам, яго ўнутраную супярэчлівасць і цыклічны характар вяртання да сталінскай спадчыны. Асаблівая ўвага надаецца ўплыву постструктуралісцкай метадалогіі на вывучэнне савецкай гісторыі, у прыватнасці фарміраванню школы савецкай суб'ектыўнасці ў англамоўнай гістарыяграфіі

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(працы С. Коткіна, І. Халфіна, Ё. Хельбека, А. Юрчака). Робіцца выснова аб тым, што выбар паміж паняццямі «паслясталінскі перыяд» і «постсталінізм» з'яўляецца выбарам паміж храналагічным апісаннем і канцэптуальным аналізам, а выкарыстанне прэфікса *пост-* у гістарычных даследаваннях сведчыць пра сталасць дысцыпліны, яе здольнасць да самарэфлексіі і міждысцыплінарнага дыялогу.

Ключавыя словы: сталінізм; постсталінізм; постструктуралізм; постмадэрн; паслясталінскі перыяд; савецкая суб'ектыўнасць; гістарычная памяць; палітыка памяці.

Падзяка. Праца выканана ў рамках дзяржаўнай праграмы навуковых даследаванняў Рэспублікі Беларусь на 2026–2030 гг. «Сацыяльна-эканамічная, палітычная і нацыянальна-культурная бяспека беларускай дзяржаўнасці» (заданне «Гістарычныя рэгіёны Расійскай імперыі, Савецкага Саюза і постсавецкай Еўразіі»).

THE TERMINOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH ON SOVIET HISTORY AFTER STALIN

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Abstract. The article examines the methodological problem of choosing terminology to designate Soviet history after the death of J. Stalin. The author analyses the distinction between the chronological concept of the «post-Stalin period» and the conceptual term «post-Stalinism». It is shown that the term «post-Stalinism» allows us to capture not merely a chronological transition, but a qualitative condition of society conditioned by the preceding period, its internal contradictions, and the cyclical nature of the return to Stalin's legacy. Special attention is paid to the influence of poststructuralist methodology on the study of Soviet history, particularly the formation of the Soviet subjectivity school in Anglophone historiography (the works of S. Kotkin, I. Halfin, J. Hellbeck, and A. Yurchak). The article concludes that the choice between terms «post-Stalin period» and «post-Stalinism» is a choice between chronological description and conceptual analysis, and that the use of the prefix *post-* in historical research indicates the maturity of the discipline, its capacity for self-reflection and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Keywords: Stalinism; post-Stalinism; poststructuralism; postmodernism; post-Stalin period; Soviet subjectivity; historical memory; politics of memory.

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Introduction

For researchers, the death of J. Stalin on 5 March 1953 is not merely a chronological boundary in the history of the Soviet Union. For historians this event poses the following methodological question: how to define what began «after»? Can we speak of a qualitatively different condition of society and the state, and how to designate terminologically the historical time under consideration? The choice between the terms «post-Stalin period» and «post-Stalinism» is not a matter of stylistics, it is a choice of research optics that determines the angle of view on an entire era.

The term «post-Stalin period» performs an important but limited function. It establishes the initial chronological framework: Stalin was – Stalin passed away. This framework is convenient for describing the sequence of events: the struggle for power in the Presidium of the Central Committee of Kommunist Party, N. Khrushchev's report at the 20th Party Congress, the rehabilitation of victims of repressions, reforms in the economy and culture. However, such an approach does not provide an answer to the duration of the post-Stalin period question, which, like any period of time, cannot be infinite. It may create the illusion of an instantaneous and complete break with the past, as if with the disappearance of the dictator's figure the system he created also disappears. By focusing on the «new», it leaves in the shade the question of what exactly from the «old» continues to exist, transforming and adapting. In reality, after J. Stalin's death the Soviet system waged a constant struggle with its own foundations, trying to modernise without changing its fundamentals. To capture this reality, it is more accurate to apply the concept of «post-Stalinism».

This term indicates not just chronology, but a new state conditioned by the preceding period. The prefix *post-* captures the dialectic: the new society is simultaneously a consequence of Stalinism, a reaction to it, and an attempt to overcome it. This is a concept borrowed from the philosophical lexicon of poststructuralism and postmodernism.

Research methodology

The research employs a historical-genetic method, which allows us to trace the evolution of the prefix *post-* in the humanities from a simple temporal marker to a full-fledged epistemological concept. This is complemented by a comparative approach, which enables a juxtaposition of how different schools of thought (positivism historiography *vs* the new cultural history) interpret the nature of the Soviet regime after 1953. A key element of the methodology is the analysis of key concepts, revealing how the semantic shift from «post-Stalin period» to «post-Stalinism» entails a fundamental change in research optics: from describing the politics of the successor leadership to analysing the deep-seated structures of everyday life, identity, and the politics of memory.

Finally, the research is based on the principle of interdisciplinarity. To deconstruct the «authorised discourse» of the late Soviet and post-Soviet eras, the study draws on the conceptual tools of poststructuralism (the works of M. Foucault on power or knowledge, J. Derrida on deconstruction) and borrows from the arsenal of Soviet subjectivity studies, as developed in the works of S. Kotkin, I. Halfin, and J. Hellbeck. This integrated approach allows the article to move from a purely historiographical description of terminology to an explanation of the cyclical nature of post-Stalinist historical consciousness.

Poststructuralism or postmodernism

The fundamental theoretical works (classics of poststructuralism) traditionally include the studies of J. Derrida [1; 2], M. Foucault [3; 4], G. Deleuze and F. Guattari [5; 6]. J. Derrida laid the foundations of the poststructuralist approach to text and the analysis of writing, to the methodology of deconstructing historical sources. M. Foucault laid the foundations for the discursive analysis of history, showing the temporal (epochal) differences in the structures of thinking that determine the possibility of knowledge. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari focused their attention on the critique of linear models of history.

The theoretical basis of postmodernist historiography was formed by the works of J.-F. Lyotard [7], who shaped the philosophical foundations of postmodernism, R. Barthes [8], who proclaimed the «death» of the author as the sole source of the meaning of the text, H. White [9], who showed that the historical work is a narrative subject to the laws of literature (the linguistic turn in historiography), and F. Ankersmit [10; 11], who explored the role of metaphor in historical knowledge. The prefix *post-* in contemporary historiography has ceased to be merely a simple marker of chronological sequence. It has been transformed into a conceptual tool, denoting not so much about «time after» as about a qualitative break, a critical rethinking and a methodological challenge to the preceding period, paradigm or structure.

Let us briefly dwell on the main ideas of poststructuralism and postmodernism borrowed by historical science in the study of Stalinism and post-Stalinism. First of all, let us note that for these philosophical paradigms the very assertion «history is a science» is unacceptable or, in a milder form, highly controversial. For them, history is to a greater extent a literary narrative, a discourse and a struggle over memory. They consider it impossible to find the only correct truth about the past and to construct universal theories of historical development. Thus, in the interpretation of poststructuralism and postmodernism, history ceases to be a science in the classical (positivist) sense, but can be viewed as a special form of discourse or narrative.

We use the term «discourse» in the sense of a historically and culturally conditioned system of language use that is inextricably linked to power. Discourse does not simply describe reality, but constructs it, creating the categories in which people think (for example, progress or regress, revolution or counterrevolution, allies or adversaries, one's own or alien). The word «narrative» in history means not just a form of exposition, but a way of giving meaning to the past. Postmodern theory asserts that the historian deals with a chaotic set of facts, documents, and testimonies. This set in itself has no meaning. Meaning appears only when the historian arranges these facts into a coherent narrative, when they create a narrative.

Soviet subjectivity

In Anglophone historiography of Soviet studies from the mid-1990s onwards, the influence of poststructuralism was most vividly manifested within the framework of the «new cultural history», which studied Soviet subjectivity, i. e. the formation of Soviet people's identity under the influence of authoritative discourse (the official language of the party and the state). Proponents of this approach believe that the binary opposition *power – society* (or *Stalinist regime – population*) does not allow explaining the complexity of Soviet transformations. Instead of studying resistance or adaptation, the focus of research should shift to analysing the strategies of mastering «Sovietness», turning it into an element of the Stalin-era people's own «self».

The first fundamental study in this direction was S. Kotkin's monograph «Magnetic mountain: Stalinism as a civilization» [12] (a brief Russian-language retelling of the monograph, proposed by the author, is available

in No. 1 of 2011 Ural Historical Journal). Although S. Kotkin did not position his work as poststructuralist, it became fundamental for subsequent research. He introduced the concept of «speaking in Bolshevik manner», denoting the desire of Soviet people to use the official language to maintain or gain a solid position in Stalinist society[1]. One can assume that the author was here reinterpreting the concept of «doublethink» by G. Orwell, used in his famous book «Nineteen eighty-four» [13].

Studies of Soviet subjectivity rely on poststructuralist methodology for analysing how Soviet people constructed themselves through language and practices. Doublethink appears not as a deviation, but as a normal mode of functioning of the subject in conditions where official discourse requires simultaneous belief in contradictions, i. e., not as a pathology, but as an adaptive mechanism. The analysis of Soviet subjectivity is especially important for understanding of the poststructuralist influence on the study of Stalinism and post-Stalinism. Researchers turned to ego-documents (diaries, letters, autobiographies) from the Stalin era to show how Soviet people «from within» perceived and absorbed ideology.

The best-known researchers in this direction are I. Halfin and J. Hellbeck. When formulating the tasks of the new direction in the study of Stalinist subjectivity, they turned precisely to S. Kotkin's monograph [14]. The scholarly stances of I. Halfin and J. Hellbeck were further articulated in the forum «Analysis of subjectivisation practices: thinking theoretically about the cultural and linguistic turns in Soviet studies»[2]. Then I. Halfin [15–17] applied poststructuralist epistemology to the analysis of party purges, class consciousness and the discourse of salvation in the early Soviet period, showing how language defined the bounds of the permissible in Soviet realities. J. Hellbeck [18] rejects the notion of a «public or private» dichotomy in the Stalin era, of Soviet people as passive victims of propaganda, and seeks to prove that many of them sincerely wanted to transform themselves into «new people» worthy of living under socialism. The collection of articles on autobiographical practices in Russia, including works by key authors of the direction is also noteworthy [19].

A fitting place in the context of discussions around the new research direction is occupied by S. Fitzpatrick's work «Tear off the masks! Identity and imposture in twentieth-century Russia» [20]. In the historiographical part, the author writes about her attitude towards the works of historians of the Soviet subjectivity school. She confirms her commitment to the school of social history, but at the same time emphasises that she does not intend to refute or support the new generation of historians. Her goal is to show her own understanding of the socio-cultural processes of the Stalin period, focusing attention on the identification and self-identification of Soviet people in class society. The author's idea is based on the recognition of the extreme importance of class stratification for the everyday life of Soviet people. She is sceptical about J. Stalin's interpretation of Marxist class theory, but takes seriously the class stratification of citizens carried out by the state. The subject of the study is not the question of the existence or non-existence of classes in their Soviet understanding, but the dependence of a person's life on the class (whether existing or non-existing) to which the state assigned them.

A synthesis of microhistory, intellectual history and the examination of Soviet subjectivity of a specific elite social group was provided by Yu. Slezkine's monograph «The House of Government: a saga of the Russian revolution» [21]. The historian describes the degeneration of the Soviet elite through the fates of the inhabitants of the «House on the embankment» (which became a symbol of the era thanks to Yu. Trifonov's book) in Moscow. The use of the poststructuralist approach allowed the author to show the transit of this social group from an exalted revolutionary ideology first to the routine of everyday life, and then to the tragedy of repression and terror.

One of the key studies of post-Stalinist, late Soviet subjectivity was A. Yurchak's book «Everything was forever, until it was no more: the last Soviet generation» [22]. The author shows how the last Soviet generation, starting from the 1950s, lived simultaneously inside the system and outside it, creating its own meaningful reality in which a fundamental transformation («the shift») in the perception of the official language of ideological discourse occurred at the level of ideology, language and rituals. External loyalty ceased to signify internal agreement.

Undoubtedly, the named studies do not exhaust the list of fundamental works analysing Stalinist and post-Stalinist historical time. But they allow us to identify the key contradictions of post-Stalinism as a stage of Soviet history. The institutional legacy, i. e. the party-state apparatus, the power structures, the mechanisms of the planned economy created or finally taking shape under J. Stalin, were not dismantled. The socio-psychological, mental state of a society that had experienced the trauma of terror, war and total control could not change instantaneously. As it adapted to the new conditions, the sense of fear weakened, but the psychology of anxiety persisted, and finally, the erosion of the ideological basis of power. The critique of the cult of personality at the 20th Communist Party Congress gave rise to a strategic crisis, doubts about the true nature of the system. These contradictions determined the most important characteristic of post-Stalinism as a cyclical

[1] A brief Russian-language summary of the monograph of S. Kotkin «Stalinism as a civilization» // Ural Hist. J. 2011. No. 1. P. 77–81 (in Russ.).

[2] Analysis of subjectivisation practices: thinking theoretically about the cultural and linguistic turns in Soviet studies // Ab Imperio. 2002. No. 3. P. 209–417.

process of partial return to J. Stalin's legacy, rather than a linear path from Stalinism to modernity.

The author and his colleagues have already demonstrated the productivity of the poststructuralist lens when applied to the post-Soviet space: a historical region, in contrast to an administrative unit, is a mental construct shaped by complex narratives, memory, and the discursive practices of power [23].

Several stages can be clearly distinguished in this cyclical process. Note that we use precisely the term «stage», since it denotes a qualitative temporal characteristic of a process. The boundaries of a stage are determined by qualitative shifts, they always presuppose movement, transition, development, indicating a stage of development or attenuation of a process. The term «period» is used as a chronological framework, and in historical research these concepts are complementary: a period is divided into stages, stages combine to form a period.

After J. Stalin's death, the authorities condemned mass terror, blaming it personally on the leader (and selectively on some persons from his entourage), liquidated the camp system and carried out mass rehabilitation. Although many researchers rightly emphasise the limited nature of the regime's criticism of J. Stalin's personal power, from our point of view this stage should be regarded as a qualitative change in the moral-psychological state of society. If the Stalinist system was based on a combination of fear and faith, the new Soviet leadership relegated fear to the background (though it did not abandon its use), attempting to bring to the forefront faith, a return to the Leninist norms of socialism. The political and economic foundations of the regime remained virtually unchanged.

After the change of the Soviet leadership in the mid-1960s, criticism of J. Stalin's personality is curtailed, and a partial rehabilitation of his era as a time of order and sovereign power takes place. However, it should be noted that J. Stalin does not return to the areopagus of national heroes. Mass terror does not return either. A special role in the legitimisation of power is assumed by the image of V. Lenin, while the victory in the Great Patriotic War, along with the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution, are positioned as the most important events of the Soviet era. The political and economic foundations of the regime remain unchanged as before.

A radical critique of J. Stalin and Stalinism was undertaken after a new change of Soviet leadership in the mid-1980s. At this time, the image of J. Stalin was transmitted to the mass consciousness as the image of a tyrant, one of the cruelest rulers in world history. For the first time, the authorities attempted to dismantle the foundations of the Stalinist system, but were unable to keep the process under their control. The Soviet Union ceased to exist, the new independent post-Soviet states became the actors of the historical process.

The new stage of post-Stalinism can no longer be regarded as a single process across the post-Soviet space. The preservation (or, conversely, the dismantling) of the institutional framework of the Stalinist system and the formation of historical memory about J. Stalin and Stalinism in post-Soviet states are categorically different. The multi-vector nature of this process allows us to see the deep connection of post-Stalinism with the phenomenon of post-Sovietness and to recognise the inevitability of a multiplicity of paths out of both «posts».

Conclusions

In a comparative perspective, the viability of the term «post-Stalinism» is becoming increasingly evident. It embeds the Soviet experience into a range of global historical processes analysed through the prism of prefix *post-*, the most well-known of which are post-Soviet and post-imperial (post-colonial) paradigms.

Of course, the widespread dissemination of the post-paradigm has not been without serious criticism. Excessive emphasis on fragmentation, in the opinion of a number of scholars, makes generalisation and social analysis impossible, depriving history of its critical and explanatory functions. Moreover, there is a danger that prefix *post-* is turning into a fashionable label, mechanically stuck onto any topic.

However, despite the criticism, the post-approach is becoming increasingly in demand among researchers. Most historians today adopt a «golden mean» position: they recognise the constructive nature of the historical narrative and the influence of discourse, but do not abandon the search for reliable facts and explanatory models based on thorough work with sources.

The prefix *after* (*post-*) has undergone an evolution from a simple chronological indicator to a profound epistemological concept. It marked the transition from a belief in objective, linear history to an understanding of history as a field of interpretations, a struggle over memory and the production of identities. The derivatives of this paradigm have made it possible to focus on the consequences of major historical ruptures, the problem of legacy, and the complex processes of deconstructing old and constructing new meanings.

Post-Stalinism reminds us that the task of the historian consists not only in the (extremely problematic) attempt at an objective description and evaluation of the past, but also in understanding how society comprehends its past, how it copes (or fails to cope) with trauma, how it constructs its identity. In this sense, the use of prefix *post-* in historical research signifies the maturity of the discipline, its capacity for self-reflection and openness to interdisciplinary influences.

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