

HISTORICAL MEMORY OF THE SETTLEMENT OF THE NORTH-WESTERN AZOV REGION (18th–19th CENTURIES) AS A FACTOR IN THE FORMATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR

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INTRODUCTION

Today, the North-Western Azov region stands at the epicenter of not only military operations but also an acute ideological confrontation. Russian armed aggression is accompanied by large-scale attempts at historical revisionism, where the past of the 18th and 19th centuries is utilized as a primary argument to legitimize the occupation. Central to this strategy is the myth of the region's «emptiness» prior to the arrival of the Russian Empire and its supposedly exclusive «Russian» reclamation.

For modern Ukrainian science and society, the conceptualization of the formation of the ethno-cultural composition of the Azov region is not merely a matter of academic interest, but a fundamental factor in the decolonization of consciousness. Historical memory of how the «wild steppe» was transformed into a flourishing agricultural and industrial land contains answers to the question of the true identity of Melitopol, Berdyansk, and other territories of Southern Ukraine.

The relevance of the topic is dictated by the need to counter the imperial «conquest» narrative with the concept of «frontier settlement», where a decisive role was played by Ukrainian Cossacks, state peasants, as well as numerous communities of Greeks, Bulgarians, and Mennonite Germans. It is this diversity of identities, united by a shared living space and economic ties, that laid the foundations of the socio-cultural environment currently resisting the aggressor's assimilation practices. Awareness of this diversity as an organic part of Ukrainian nation-building is the key to understanding the region's resilience.

1. Deconstruction of the «Novorossiia» Myth in the Context of Ukrainian Frontier Theory

Modern scientific discourse regarding the history of Southern Ukraine is in a state of intensive decolonization. For a long period, domestic historiography, remaining under the influence of imperial and Soviet paradigms, involuntarily reproduced the narrative of the Russian Empire's «civilizing mission» in the «wild steppe». The central construct of this system is the «Novorossiia» mythologeme – an ideological project aimed at erasing historical memory of the pre-imperial period and neutralizing the agency of the ethnic groups who actually reclaimed this space.

The «Novorossiia» myth is based on several interconnected postulates. First, the thesis of the «emptiness» of the North-Western Azov territories until their annexation by the Russian Empire in the late 18th century. The image of a *tabula rasa* was promoted, upon which monarchical will began to write history «from scratch». Second, the assertion of an exclusively state-driven (imperial) character of colonization, where the administration, army, and nobility acted as the primary and almost sole drivers of progress.

Such an approach deliberately ignored centuries of existence of Cossack *zymivnyky* (winter quarters), industries, and trade routes. Even in cases where the presence of the Ukrainian population was acknowledged, it was reduced to the status of «ethnographic material», devoid of political or historical weight. In the context of modern war, this myth has been resuscitated by the aggressor as a justification for territorial claims, making its scientific deconstruction a matter not only of truth but of national security.

Important steps in refuting colonial narratives were taken in the works of F. Turchenko and G. Turchenko, who focused attention on the real historical state of Southern Ukraine prior to the 19th century. Researchers resolutely reject the claim of «civilizational emptiness» in the region, demonstrating that imperial settlement policies were superimposed on an already existing socio-economic structure¹. The authors identify the Nogais and Ukrainian Cossacks as the true subjects of economic and cultural development in the Azov region. G. Turchenko emphasizes that it was this pre-imperial

¹ Турченко Г., Турченко Ф. Проект «Новоросія»: 1764–2014. Ювілей на крові. Запоріжжя: ЗНУ, 2014. 116 с.

multi-layeredness and economic heritage that became the foundation for the formation of a specific regional identity, which subsequently integrated into the pan-Ukrainian context despite the imperial center's attempts to neutralize the role of local factors¹.

The alternative to the imperial vision is Frontier Theory, adapted to Ukrainian realities. A frontier is not merely a border, but a mobile zone of interaction between different cultures, ethnicities, and political systems. In the context of the North-Western Azov region, Frontier Theory allows for a shift in focus from «conquest» to «reclamation/settlement».

The Ukrainian frontier in the 18th and 19th centuries had its own specifics. Unlike the American frontier, where colonization was often accompanied by the displacement of indigenous peoples, the Azov borderland was formed as a space of intensive interaction. Here, state colonization, manifested in the founding of cities and the distribution of land to the nobility, always followed folk colonization². Deconstructing the «Novorossiya» myth through the lens of the frontier reveals that the Azov territory was not empty; it was integrated into the economic system of the South through the activities of Cossack society, even if official borders, as in the case of the Kalmius Palanka, lay further east. The influence of the Cossack way of life was the dominant cultural marker of the region, and the economic survival and prosperity of the North-Western Azov were ensured by the initiative of free settlers, state peasants, and foreign colonists, who often acted despite, rather than because of, imperial bureaucracy.

Under the conditions of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the «Novorossiya» myth has transformed into an aggressive political technology. The occupiers' attempts to present Azov cities (Melitopol, Berdyansk, Henichesk) as «ancient Russian» are based precisely on ignoring the frontier nature of their origin. Deconstructing this myth in academic and public spaces allows the region to reclaim its true essence. The North-Western Azov region

¹ Турченко Г. Ф. Историчний вибір: Південна Україна чи Новоросія. *Наукові праці історичного факультету Запорізького національного університету*. 2010. Вип. XXIX. С. 77–87.

² Верменич Я. Південноукраїнські фронтони у XVIII–XIX ст. *Український Мультифронтир: нова схема історії України* (неоліт – початок XX століття) / Упор. С. Громенко. Харків: ВД «Фабула», 2024. С. 295–332.

of the 18th and 19th centuries appears not as the «South of Russia», but as a dynamic southern borderland of Ukraine, where a special type of personality was forged – free, enterprising, and capable of self-organization. These are precisely the traits that today constitute the basis of civil resistance in occupied and frontline territories.

Instead of a hierarchical and stagnant «Novorossiya», we see a living Ukrainian frontier where every social group – from Cossack descendants to Mennonite farmers – contributed to the creation of a shared home. This vision of history leaves no room for imperial manipulation, as it is based on the real experience of millions of people whose labor and blood made this steppe part of Ukraine.

Thus, the application of Frontier Theory to the study of the Azov region's settlement allows not only for the refutation of propaganda clichés but also for the formation of a coherent narrative of national history, where the South is an organic, inseparable, and agentic part of the Ukrainian geopolitical space. The first step in forming a stable national identity is a critical review of the terminological apparatus imposed by imperial historiography. The concept of «Novorossiya», which is actively exploited by Russian propaganda today, was in the 18th and 19th centuries merely an administrative name that did not reflect the actual ethnic composition of the region.

2. Ethno-Cultural Diversity as a Factor of European Identity in the Azov Region

The formation of the ethno-cultural composition of the North-Western Azov region in the 19th century was a complex, multi-vector process that went far beyond mere imperial administration. The region developed as a unique space where the diversity of identities became not a source of social tension, but a driver of economic, technological, and cultural progress. This experience is critically important today for scientific counter-action against Russian propaganda, which seeks to simplify the history of the region into a linear scheme of «Russian conquest».

The uniqueness of the North-Western Azov region lies in its multi-ethnic space of interaction between peoples, which began to form intensively after the liquidation of the Crimean Khanate and the final establishment of new borders. Unlike the central provinces of the empire with their serfdom system, the Azov region

transformed into a space of accelerated modernization. Here, state colonization always followed folk colonization and the targeted attraction of foreign settlers. For a long time, the imperial model of memory sought to unify these groups within the construct of «All-Russian culture». However, the reality was much more complex, because Mennonites, Germans, Bulgarians, Greeks, and Jews did not simply «coexist» with the Ukrainian majority, but created a complex system of interdependencies. Each of these groups brought its own social practices, religious values, and economic models, which collectively formed a unique regional society oriented toward development and integration into global processes.

The understanding of the ethno-cultural composition of the North-Western Azov region at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century is impossible without considering the Nogai factor. The Nogais did not merely belong to local ethnic groups – they embodied a centuries-old nomadic civilization that for a long time determined the way of life in the region. Their fate during this period became a classic example of how imperial expansion gradually narrows the living space of autochthonous communities, forcing them into painful adaptation or emigration. Before the start of the active phase of the Russian offensive, the Azov region was an organic part of the nomadic *oikumene*. The Nogai Hordes, migrating here in the 16th–18th centuries, formed a complex social structure at the epicenter of a geopolitical triangle. On one hand, they served as a military-demographic reserve for the Crimean Khanate; on the other, they constantly interacted with the Zaporozhian Cossacks and the Russian Empire. This territory functioned as a classic frontier space – a zone without clear state boundaries where traditional nomadic routes dominated. The annexation of Crimea radically changed the status of the Nogais. The Russian administration, seeking the unification of subject territories, quickly shifted from tactics of declarative «partnership» to direct pressure. A key moment was the liquidation of the autonomy of the Azov Nogais in 1804.

The empire began a large-scale experiment in resource redistribution, as a result of which the heart of the Nogai nomad camps, particularly lands along the Molochna River, were seized for the needs of foreign colonists and state peasants. This not only undermined the economic base of the Nogais but also created

conditions for forced sedentarization. The transition to a settled life proved traumatic for the Nogai community. This is clearly traced in the evolution of housing, where instead of mobile yurts, stationary settlements of adobe and raw brick appeared. The absence of solid foundations and primitive construction technologies made these *auls* visually «temporary» and poor against the backdrop of the stone buildings of German Mennonites or Greeks. Such a contrast became a visible marker of the social hierarchy built by the empire. The Russo-Turkish wars of the 19th century finally turned the Muslim population of the Azov region into a category of the «disloyal». The creation of unbearable economic conditions and ideological pressure provoked mass emigration to the Ottoman Empire¹. This process, though it had formal signs of voluntariness, was essentially a masqueraded deportation.

The disappearance of the Nogais from the ethnic map of the region opened the way for a new wave of colonization. The emptied steppes became a field for the deployment of Ukrainian peasant reclamation, which, unlike state projects, had a powerful spontaneous character and subsequently transformed the Azov region into an organic part of the Ukrainian national space.

In the social architecture of the North-Western Azov region in the first half of the 19th century, a key role belonged to the stratum of state (crown) peasants². This category of the population was not only the most numerous but also the most dynamic, acting as the primary subject of the economic reclamation of the steppe. State peasants combined a status of personal freedom with fiscal dependence on the treasury through the system of poll tax and *obrok* (quitrent). The process of filling the region with state settlers was multi-vector and based on a combination of forced and spontaneous migration flows. A significant portion of the crown population consisted of descendants of the Zaporozhians. After the liquidation of the Sich, a painful period began for the former Cossackhood – transfer to the taxable peasant estate. This loss of privileged status was a deep social trauma, yet at

¹ Скальковский А. А. Хронологическое обозрение истории Новороссийского края. 1730–1823. Ч. 2. Одесса, 1838. С. 71.

² Васильчук Г. М., Ликова В. В. Чисельність державних селян Південної України в першій половині XIX ст.: джерелознавчий аналіз. Наукові праці історичного факультету Запорізького національного університету. Вип. XXIX. 2010. С. 272.

the same time, it laid a Cossack cultural identity at the foundation of the local peasantry, oriented toward autonomy and a love of freedom. The state also actively utilized the demographic resource of the overpopulated Left-Bank and Sloboda Ukraine¹. Flows of colonists from the Poltava and Chernihiv provinces were part of a purposeful policy of «unburdening» the center and rapid agrarian exploitation of the South. An important component of the settlement of the South was fugitives from the Right Bank. The mass movement of serf peasants fleeing from Polish and Russian landlords created a dilemma for the authorities. On one hand, the law required the return of fugitives; on the other, the region desperately needed labor. As a result, a practice of «clandestine connivance» emerged, according to which, under confidential orders (such as P. Zubov's instructions to the Yekaterinoslav governor²), fugitives were often legalized through registration in crown communities, effectively recognizing their right to a new life in exchange for loyalty and taxes.

Despite the significant share of spontaneous processes, the colonization of the Azov region in the first half of the 19th century was not chaotic. On the contrary, it unfolded within a framework of strict regulatory control. Even internal movements between neighboring provinces required official sanction. A special instrument of control became «secret police supervision»³. The introduction of special filtration mechanisms regarding settlers was dictated by the deep distrust of the imperial apparatus toward the mobile population. This «police supervision» aimed to weed out politically dangerous elements: not only fugitive serfs but also participants in Polish liberation uprisings. The presence of the latter on southern lands was viewed as a potential threat to regional stability, requiring constant monitoring by punitive organs.

A central element of the European identity of the Azov region became the experience of foreign colonists. The expansion of the

¹ Державний архів Херсонської області. Ф. 324. Оп. 1. Спр. 35. Доповідні записки (рапорти) малоросійського генерал-губернатора міністру внутрішніх справ про переселення козаків і державних селян Полтавської та Чернігівської губерній в Херсонську та Таврійську губернії. 1806–1810 рр. Арк. 10–14.

² Багалій Д. І. Заселення Південної України. Харків: «СОЮЗ», 1920. С. 69.

³ Державний архів Херсонської області. Ф. 1. Оп. 1. Спр. 11. Рапорти поміщиків й листування з Київським, Подільським й іншими губернськими правліннями про встановлення таємного поліцейського нагляду за особами, що отримали дозвіл на в'їзд в Херсонську губернію. 1842 р. Арк. 81–83.

ethno-cultural composition of the North-Western Azov region at the beginning of the 19th century was closely linked to a new wave of settlers, among whom Balkan communities and representatives of the empire's religious minorities held a special place.

Bulgarian presence in the region began to form somewhat later than the Ukrainian one, acquiring a mass character following a series of Russo-Turkish wars. For thousands of Bulgarian families, the Azov region became a sanctuary from Ottoman pressure, which determined the predominantly refugee character of this migration. The primary area of their settlement became the Berdyansk district and the Taurida Governorate as a whole¹. The economic adaptation of Bulgarian settlers led to the formation of a distinct economy. Being in spatial proximity to Nogai nomad camps, Bulgarian communities managed to integrate elements of transhumance livestock farming into their own agrarian system. The combination of a high level of internal solidarity and a patriarchal structure became the mechanism that allowed Bulgarian colonies to preserve their linguistic and customary authenticity for centuries, despite all assimilation challenges. In the conditions of the modern struggle for historical memory, the experience of the Bulgarian community is quite important for deconstructing the myth of a «monolithic Russian world» in Southern Ukraine.

A separate vector of the imperial colonization strategy was the reliance on religious communities of Old Believers and Molokans. Despite their opposition to the official church, the authorities saw powerful economic potential in these groups. By stimulating their migration to the Steppe Taurida, the government attempted to create «showcase» models of successful farming that would demonstrate the region's advantages to fellow believers abroad. A striking example of such a protectionist policy was the settlement of the banks of the Kinski Vody River by people from Znamyanka in 1784. The state consciously granted the Old Believers exclusive preferences: long-term tax holidays, exemption from billeting and mandatory duties, and maximum simplification of administrative procedures. Such support

¹ Ситник О. М. Проблема збереження національної ідентичності болгар Північного Приазов'я у XIX – на початку ХХІ століття. *Етносоціальні аспекти вивчення історії Південної України 18-20 ст.*: монографія / Крилова А. М. (відп. ред.), Гудзь В. В. (редагування та передмова), Полякова Л. І., Пачев С. І., Ситник О. М., Шкода Н. А. Запоріжжя, 2024. С. 34.

triggered a chain reaction, activating migration movements toward the modern Melitopol region. Parallel to this, within the framework of a systemic policy of replacing the nomadic population with a settled one, the creation of Molokan colonies was authorized on former Nogai lands near the Molochna River¹. This marked a transition to a new stage of regional reclamation, where the religious identity of the settlers became an additional stimulus for their economic and social stability in a new place.

Mennonite settlements on the Molochna River (Halbstadt, Gnadenfeld) effectively became outposts of European agrarian culture. They introduced advanced farming methods, created model farmsteads, and developed export-oriented industry. For the Mennonite community, the Azov region was not a periphery of Russia, but part of a global network of like-minded people stretching from Prussia to North America.

No less important was the role of the Greek community. Although the main body of Mariupol Greeks was localized further east, their influence on the trade infrastructure of the entire North-Western Azov region was decisive. Through the Greek and Italian trading houses of Berdyansk, the region was directly connected to the Mediterranean civilizational space.

Thus, the economic agency of the region was based on private initiative and free enterprise – values that fundamentally contradicted the imperial vertical. The identity of a resident of Berdyansk or Melitopol in the 18th and 19th centuries was formed through maritime trade, international contacts, and a multilingual environment. It was this diversity of identities, integrated into the Ukrainian socio-cultural space, that laid the foundations of the regional community that proved capable of long-term resistance to assimilation. When the empire tried to impose a unified model of a subject, the inhabitants of the Azov region preserved the memory of their special rights, privileges, and autonomy. Today, this memory is actualized as a «European alternative» to occupation practices.

Under the conditions of the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation, the theme of ethno-cultural diversity acquires a

¹ Шандра В., Аркуша О. Україна в ХІХ столітті: людиність та імперії / НАН України, Ін-т історії України. Київ: Академперіодика, 2022. С. 86.

distinctly political resonance. Russian propaganda seeks to present the multi-ethnicity of the region as proof of its «non-Ukrainianness». However, scientific analysis proves the opposite: Ukrainian nation-building in the South occurred not through the displacement of other cultures, but through their integration into a single civic space, where the Ukrainian language and culture acted as a natural basis for interaction. Returning the region to its true essence as an open, multicultural, and European space is a key task for the decolonization of history. This allows the residents of the Azov region to identify themselves not as objects of an imperial experiment, but as heirs to a complex and majestic European history, where every ethnic group contributed to the building of a common home.

Thus, the ethno-cultural diversity of the 18th and 19th centuries is not merely a fact of the past, but a living factor of modern national identity. It marks the Azov region as a space of freedom and variety, making it organically incompatible with modern totalitarian ideologies. The knowledge that the ancestors of modern Azov residents built this land as part of the civilized world strengthens national identity, marking the territory as an integral part of Ukraine and Europe. This diversity does not divide, but on the contrary – creates a strong foundation for a civic nation, where Ukrainian statehood is the guarantor of preserving the cultural identity of all ethnic groups.

3. Transformation of Historical Memory under Conditions of Occupation and War

During the period of the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation, historical memory regarding the settlement of the North-Western Azov region in the 18th and 19th centuries ceased to be an exclusive object of academic study. It has transformed into a dynamic factor of national security and one of the key markers of the civilizational affiliation of the region's inhabitants. Under conditions of occupation and active combat, knowledge of the past has transformed from theoretical baggage into an instrument of intellectual resistance.

The Russian occupation authorities view history as «soft power» meant to legitimize the armed seizure of territories. The main vector of this strategy is the attempt to completely displace

Ukrainian and European components from the memory of the Azov region's development, replacing them with the imperial myth of «historically Russian lands». In practice, this manifests as the targeted destruction of monuments that marked the Ukrainian agency of the region, and the mass return of Soviet and imperial names to streets and city squares (Berdyansk, Melitopol), which aims to create an illusion of «historical continuity» of Russian presence. Textbooks are being introduced where the settlement of the land is presented exclusively as an act of monarchical will, and the diversity of identities is neutralized in favor of the «one people» ideologeme. Such actions by the occupiers are aimed at stripping the region of its true essence as a free frontier space, turning it into an ideological appendage of the «Russian World».

Yet, despite colossal pressure, the socio-cultural environment of the North-Western Azov region demonstrates a high degree of resilience. This is explained by the fact that memory of the region's past in the Ukrainian tradition is based on the principles of freedom, private property, and entrepreneurship – values that were the foundation of the space of accelerated modernization in the 19th century. For residents of occupied territories and internally displaced persons, the awareness that their ancestors – Cossacks, state peasants, or foreign colonists – built this land with their own labor, rather than by decree from Moscow, becomes a form of «internal de-occupation». Historical memory of how Ukrainian colonization always followed the needs of a free person, and not just state interest, creates immunity to propaganda. In this context, Cossack heritage acts not just as a folklore element, but as a deep cultural bedrock that determines models of behavior. The tradition of self-organization, inherent to the frontier communities of the Azov region in the 18th century, manifests today in the volunteer movement, partisan resistance, and the community's ability to hold together even in the direst circumstances.

An important feature of the transformation of memory during the war is its transition into the digital space. Social networks, electronic archives, and virtual museums have become repositories of the region's true image. When physical museums under occupation are looted or turned into centers of propaganda, the digital recording of family histories, documents about Mennonite colonies, or Cossack industries becomes an act of preserving the

national genetic code. The modern historian in this process fulfills the role not only of a scientist but also of a mediator of memory. Providing the community with scientifically grounded facts about the true history of the region's settlement allows for the refutation of these about the «artificiality» of Ukrainian presence in the Azov region and strengthens the sense of unity of the Azov region with the pan-Ukrainian process of nation-building.

In view of modern Russian armed aggression and the temporary occupation of the territories of the North-Western Azov region, an urgent task is to rethink the paradigm of researching the process of forming the ethno-cultural composition of the region's population during the second half of the 18th to the mid-19th century. Since the Russian state for several centuries attempted to occupy and Russify these ancient Ukrainian territories. At present, we are observing the culmination of these aggressive actions, as the Russian Federation once again attempts to resuscitate the «Novorossiia» project, fabricated back in the second half of the 18th century¹. Under the conditions of the modern Russo-Ukrainian war, Ukrainian historical traditions and national dignity have once again faced difficult trials. For the invaders, in this existential war unleashed by the RF against the Ukrainian people, primarily seek to purposefully destroy Ukrainian national identity². Yu. Sytnyk rightly noted that in the course of the modern hybrid war unleashed by the Kremlin against Ukraine, the Russian Federation utilizes a whole spectrum of hybrid information technologies, including the «Russian World» doctrine, which encroaches on all territories where a Russian-speaking population resides. At the same time, for several centuries, Ukrainians have undergone artificial deformation of their cultural and national identity³.

¹ Ситник О., Горбова, О., Ситник К. Парадигма дослідження процесу формування етнокультурного складу населення Північно-Західного Приазов'я (друга половина XVIII – середина XIX ст.): контекст сьогодення. *Axis Europae. Серія історія*. 2025. Issue 7. С. 14.

² Гудзь В. В., Ситник О. М., Ситник Ю. В. Мелітопольський громадянський спротив як складова частина руху опору рашистським окупантам. *Education and science as factors of post-war reconstruction: historical experience, lessons for Ukraine. Scientific monograph*. Riga, Latvia: "Baltija Publishing", 2025. С. 57–58.

³ Sytnyk Y. The imposition of the «Russian world» in Ukraine as a means of deformation of the cultural and national identity of the Ukrainians of the Donetsk region. *Zaporizhzhia Historical Review*. No. 53. Vol. 1. 2019. PP. 204–209.

Thus, the transformation of historical memory under wartime conditions proves that the battle for the past is an integral part of the struggle for the future. If for the aggressor, the history of the Azov region's settlement is a justification for conquest, for Ukrainian society, it is a source of strength and an argument in favor of agency. Awareness that the North-Western Azov region was formed as a complex, multi-ethnic, and dynamic space where the Ukrainian component was defining is key to understanding the inevitability of de-occupation. The region's past, cleansed of imperial layers, becomes a solid foundation for the formation of a modern national identity capable of resisting any external threats.

CONCLUSIONS

As our research has shown, the North-Western Azov region was never a *tabula rasa* upon which the empire wrote its own history. This region developed as a complex frontier where the Ukrainian ethnos played the role of the pivotal element, ensuring the continuity of economic and cultural life. The modern national identity of the residents of the Azov region is based on the recognition of this agency. The attempts of the RF to resuscitate the concept of «Novorossiya» are an artificial construct that ignores real ethno-cultural processes. Deconstructing this myth through the study of the documentary history of settlement is critically important for overcoming the consequences of the colonial past. Under the conditions of the Russo-Ukrainian war, historical memory has transformed into a strategic resource. It serves as a «friend-or-foe» marker and helps the residents of the region maintain a connection with the Ukrainian state project even in the most difficult circumstances. The future of the North-Western Azov region is inextricably linked with its Ukrainian roots. Returning to the true, undistorted history of the region's settlement is a guarantee for the restoration of territorial integrity and the formation of a unified socio-cultural space of Ukraine, where the memory of the past works for the building of a free and independent state.

ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates the role of historical memory regarding colonization processes in the North-Western Azov region during the 18th and 19th centuries within the context of contemporary nation-building. It analyzes the conflict between the imperial myth of «historically Russian lands» and the actual historical past of the region as a multi-ethnic frontier. The study identifies that the deconstruction of the «Novorossiya» concept and the revitalization of Cossack and early modern heritage serve as key instruments in countering the ideological aggression of the Russian Federation. The work emphasizes the importance of highlighting the agency of the Ukrainian peasantry and foreign colonists in the economic development of the region. The findings demonstrate that the continuity of historical memory regarding the settlement of the Azov region provides the foundation for forming a resilient regional identity as an integral component of Ukraine's broader civilizational choice. It is proven that under wartime conditions, the history of the region's settlement transforms from a purely academic topic into a potent factor of national security and resistance.

АНОТАЦІЯ

У даному розділі досліджується роль історичної пам'яті про колонізаційні процеси у Північно-Західному Приазов'ї XVIII–XIX ст. у контексті сучасного націєтворення. Проаналізовано конфлікт між імперським міфом про «споконвічно російські землі» та реальним історичним минулим регіону як багатоетнічного фронтиру. Виявлено, що деконструкція концепту «Новоросії» та актуалізація козацької та ранньомодерної спадщини є ключовими інструментами протидії ідеологічній агресії РФ. У роботі наголошується на важливості висвітлення суб'єктності українського селянства та іноземних колоністів у господарському освоєнні краю. Результати дослідження засвідчують, що тяглість історичної пам'яті про заселення Приазов'я є фундаментом для формування стійкої регіональної ідентичності як невід'ємної складової загальноукраїнського цивілізаційного вибору. Доведено, що в умовах війни історія заселення регіону трансформується з суто академічної теми у дієвий чинник національної безпеки та спротиву.

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