Northern cultural history can refer to at least three things:

1) cultural history altogether is taught and studied in the North,
2) the subject taught and studied is the cultural history of the North in particular,
3) the often missing northern dimension is brought to the interpretations of cultural history.

The border between the North and the South is anything but easy to mark. In this presentation, when I use the adjective attribute “northern” I refer to the north calotte, that is the Arctic area of the Nordic countries and the Kola Peninsula in Russia, and when speaking of Lapland, I mean the Finnish and Swedish Lapland.

In Finland cultural history is an independent subject in the University of Turku and in the University of Lapland. Thus cultural history is taught and studied in the North, whether the word “north” is understood in its broader global and European context or in a narrower Scandinavian and national context.
The University of Lapland is the northernmost university in Finland and the European Union. Therefore it is natural that cultural history there is interested particularly in the northern society: I mean the interaction between the past, the present and the future, between the northern nature and people, between cultural, linguistic and ethnic communities and, finally, between the North and the South.

Historically, methodologically and even ideologically, an aspiration for multidisciplinary co-operation, with a comprehensive and commonly recognised principle of a dialogue between synchronic and diachronic analysis and a shared understanding of the presence of history, has been the substratum of northern cultural history in Finland. Its relationship with northern everyday life actively produces discourse.

This naturally leads to a tendency to bring the northern world of experience and life to those overall interpretations of the past – and thus also the present – from which it has either intentionally or by pure habit been left out. This tendency is also in a wider sense connected to the premises of the so-called new histories that demand space for those who have been consigned to the geographical, social and mental margins.

Alongside and in relation to the policy of memory and forgetting, I seek to analyse and conceptualise northern cultural history from the point of view of ethnocentrism, essentialising, projective view and iconic cliché, and cultural translation. I look for alternative or parallel ways of conceptualising the post-colonial discourse that has for long been centred on the concepts of, for example, orientalism, identity and otherness. Finally, the question arises of the tensions between contextuality or situatedness and the supracultural formation of theory, when the subject of the study is a culturally and regionally distinctive, multifaceted, multilayered and multiethnic world of experiences of the past.
The northern way of life has taken on its shape over centuries, even millennia as people’s responses to the challenges posed by nature, climate and livelihood. The distance from the centre points of the mental and material maps and the old cultural centres of Europe, the short and light summer, long, cold and dark winter, multiethnicity and sparse population have brought, and still bring features of northern everyday life. These conditions have always had their impact not only on housing, clothing, livelihoods and the movement of people, but also on social interaction, physiological and mental functions.

Germania, a booklet by Publius Cornelius Tacitus in 98 AD, gives a description based on assumptions about the Fenni, living on the edge of the world, who have commonly been linked to the forefathers of the Finns and the Sámi. The description is a classic example – and at the same time a historical example for many subsequent describers of Lapland – of the ethnocentric construction produced by the author’s projective view.

Here the concept of projective view approaches the questions of ethnocentric and “otherness-producing” methods, but on a psycho-historical level. By the concept of projection I refer to the externalisation of the conflicts and distressing or uncomfortable traits in the mind or culture, and thus the split of the experience of reality into the good self and non-good other.

In Tacitus’ case, the author’s projective gaze builds a contrasting image to the phenomena of one’s own civilisation of the innocent wilds who, on the other hand, have in their primitive way of life unknowingly achieved the Stoic ideal.

Professor of Sámi culture, Veli-Pekka Lehtola has also noticed how Tacitus creates the basic elements for subsequent writings about the Sámi by using the logic of negativity: there are no weapons nor horses nor houses; the only hope is in arrows for which there is no iron but only bone etc.
The view was shared by many central and southern European scholars and artists who became interested in the land of the midnight sun from the 15th to the 20th centuries. Like accounts of strange continents and the exotic East, vivid images and descriptions about the supposedly peculiar nature and people of Lapland and their habits were published in different languages across Europe.

One of them was the travelogue *Voyage de Laponie* by Jean-François Regnard, published posthumously in 1731. Regnard made his journey to Lapland in the late summer of 1681. His famous descriptions of the Sámi are concrete examples of the projective view of the stranger:

*These were the first Laplanders we had seen, and the sight of them gave us much satisfaction. They came to barter fish for tobacco. We regarded them attentively from head to foot; they are made quite differently from other men. The tallest of them is not more than three eubits high; and I know not any figure more truly laughable. They have large heads, broad and flat faces, level noses, small eyes, large mouths, and thick beards, descending to their stomach. All their limbs are proportioned to their littleness of body; their legs are thin, their arms long, and the whole of this little machine seems to move on springs. — —*

*Such, sir is the description of this little animal, called a Laplander; and it may be said, that, after the monkey, he approaches the nearest to man.*

The tale Regnard tells also produces interesting paradoxes. First he writes as follows:

*I shall now state, in general, that all the inhabitants of this country are naturally sluggish and lazy, and nothing but hunger and necessity can chase them from their huts, and oblige them to labour.*
And then follows a long account of work methods, tools, hunting and transportation equipment, food procurement and other tasks and skills related to everyday life, which this “sluggish and lazy” population had produced as responses to the demanding challenges of the Arctic circumstances.

It is interesting how resolutely Regnard not only degrades but also homogenises the other in relation to the self. The oft-repeated words “always” and “all”, “generally / in general” and “naturally” aim at convincing the reader that not the slightest similarity exists between the self and the essentially other, and that there is no danger or possibility of mixing these two.

Having found some suitable informants, Regnard begins to speak of “our Laplanders” as if he and his party had somehow been attached to their subjectivity – including the idols, rites and ritual artefacts that hold the Sámi worldview and community together:

_Notwithstanding all that our Laplanders could say, to prevent us from carrying off these gods, we failed not to diminish the number of Seyta’s family, and to take each of us one of his children; while they failed not to threaten us, and to call down imprecations on our head, by assuring us that our journey should be unsuccessful, if we excited the wrath of the gods._

In fact the journey did end in an embarrassing way when he could not publish the story about it in fear of being accused of plagiarism.

Elsewhere the author tells about an encounter with a shaman – or someone pretending to be one – as follows:

_When we saw that we could procure no information from our Laplander, we amused ourselves with making him drunk; and this deprivation of reason, which continued three or four days, gave_
us an opportunity of stealing from him all his magical instruments

[Half of nothingness, monotony]

At the end of the 1830s a French literary man, explorer and academician Xavier Marmier travelled from the shores of the Arctic Ocean through the Finnish and Swedish Lapland to the south. The stranger describes the meeting of his party with the Lapps in the wilderness:

The hut housed two families who had brought together their herds after having visited the coast of Norway for fishing; and they were now slowly returning to the vicinity of Koutokeino for the winter. Both men wore a tattered, filthy costume made of reindeer skin, and the women were no more stylish or clean in their appearance. Inside the hut, which was put together in a typical manner for all Lappish huts, by spreading tatters of woollen cloth on wooden poles, there were only three wooden vessels, a kettle on the fire, and a child’s cradle.

Having reached the municipality of Karesuvanto in the Swedish Lapland the party camped at the vicarage of Lars Levi Laestadius (who became the most influential religious authority in the Lappish religious history until today). In this small and dark cottage the relative modesty turned into relative luxury after everything Marmier’s party had experienced in the wilderness:

It was now first time in many weeks that we could make use of true household utensils. As we began our meal, we sat at the table and drank from glasses; neither a Sèvres porcelain service nor silver tableware could have brought us a greater joy as the simple, painted pots of clay or the iron forks.
For the French academician real household equipment is such that it most calls to mind – albeit in a somewhat amusing way – his own. Even the interior equipment of the Sámi nomad’s hut that is most practical in its own context does not feel real or adequate.

Marmier’s description of the town of the Lappish town Tornio is classic in its disdain, but in 1799, the Englishman Edward Daniel Clarke also headed north and said that he wanted to convey an accurate idea by description of “a town so little known as Tornio”:

> It consists of two principal streets, nearly half an English mile length. The houses are all of wood. After what has been said of its civilized external aspect, it ought only to be considered as less barbarious, in its appearance, than the generality of towns in the north of Sweden. It must not be inferred, that there is the slightest similitude between this place and one of the towns in England. If it were possible to transport the reader, now engaged in perusing this description, into the midst of Torneo the first impression upon his mind would be, that he was surrounded by a number of fagot-stacks, and piles of timber, heaped by the water side for exportation, rather than inhabited houses.

The stranger not only projects but also decontextualises, recontextualises and makes a cultural translation about what he sees into the language of his own Central European norms.

He also seems to consider it important – having first, as if by accident, let slip the word “civilized” – to assure his readers that not even the slightest similarity or possibility of confusing the two can be shown between the own and the strange. In fact “a town so little known as Tornio” was, at that point, very well known in Central Europe through various travelogues. It is, then, probably not a coincidence that Clarke, too, wanted to write a description of it.

Another who must have read Regnard, Marmier and possibly even Clarke was the French poet Charles Baudelaire whose posthumous collection
published in 1869, *Petit poëms en prose* included a prose poem *N’importe’ou hors du monde* or *Anywhere out of the world*. In it the poet converses with his “poor chilly” soul about how “I should always be happy if I were somewhere else”. He first suggests settling by the water in the warm and light Lisbon, but the mind keeps silent. Then he suggests heavenly Holland but the mind remains mute. Nor does the tropical Batavia excite the poet’s soul. Finally he becomes frustrated and asks:

> Have you sunk then into so deep a stupor that only your own pain gives you pleasure? If that be so, let us go to the lands that are made in the likeness of Death. I know exactly the place for us, poor soul! We will book our passage to Torneo. We will go still further, the limits of the Baltic; and, if it is possible, further still from life; we will make our abode at the Pole. There the sun only gazes the earth, and the stow alternations of light and night put out variety and bring in the half of nothingness, monotony. There we can take great baths of darkness, while, from time to time, for pleasure, the Aurora Borealis shall scatter its rosy sheaves before us, like reflections of fireworks in hell!"

> At last my soul bursts into speech, and wisely she cries to me:
> “Anywhere, anywhere, out of the world!”

The 17th to 19th century European travelogues from Lapland must be seen in their own historical and cultural context, as a part of the cultural history of travelling and travel literature of their time, in which sense they have played a part in creating the mental geography of travel literature – and the mental map of Europe. But the Finnish and Swedish scribes, artists and explorers have not concealed their projective view either.

The Finnish author Ernst Lampén has described his 1920 pilgrimage to see the “authentic Lapps” and recalled how, in the middle of the peatland the Lappish boy hired to be their guide, began to sing utterly inauthentic “continental jingles”, tunes from *The Merry Widow* and other frivolous
operettas. It turned out, Lampén explains, that he had learned them on his journeys with the so-called Lapp caravans in Central Europe.

The story – true or not – is linked to the historical fact, that from the middle of the 19th century until the 1930s at least, 30 Sámi groups are known to have toured on display in Europe and even the United States. The caravans were part of the series of exhibitions in which “primitive peoples” of the world and “subordinate cultures” were shown at funfairs, circuses and zoos in big cities.

[Clichés and forgetting]

At the beginning of the third millennium – especially in commercial and popular culture – such epithets as periphery and marginal or various iconic clichés like the northern lights, Santa Claus, or the Sámi dressed in their colourful festive costumes with their reindeers are still allowed to represent Lapland and its culture:

With *iconic cliché* I mean an image that establishes itself as the interpretation of the historical truth and overwhelms other, alternative images and interpretations.

As far from Lapland as at the Helsinki Market Square the souvenir stalls are filled with Lapland dolls – most probably, sadly enough – made in East Asia. What some see as harmless knickknacks may to others be proof of blatant ethnic overexploitation. In building an artificial reality in the name of the commodification of history, the people of Lapland themselves – especially in the field of the tourism industry – have not by any means remained idle.

The exoticising and ethnocentric attitude easily ignores the polyphony of everyday North. This was seen in an interesting way in the reception received by the publications that the *Northern Identities and Mentalities* research project of the University of Lapland produced in the end of the 1990s.
The objective of the project and its publications was to disclose the everyday arctic in all its variety. However, the book reviews were almost solely interested in the Sámi that represented the exception, exoticism and contradictions. They also interested in conflicts and extreme phenomena like religious fundamentalism and environmental disputes. The everyday life of the Northern people was passed by in silence.

The collection of stereotypes includes the image of everyone in Lapland as a Conservative Laestadian believer – or, alternatively, drunk, at least in the case of the Sámi and artists. They all are supposed to vote for the Centre party and to speak the same dialect in the same funny way. On the other hand, the Laplanders’ conceptions, for their part, of the South may be very straightforward and projecting. Sociologist Leena Suopajärvi has studied the battle lines and the strategies and arguments in the conflicts over the river engineering, using for example newspapers in Lapland and interviews. She has also considered how the people of Lapland see those living in the Southern Finland:

_The South is an odd place in the sense that only lords, men and other decision-makers live there. The lords make the decisions and quote the law to us in Lapland on how to use our land and water rights. The southern man is after the natural resources of Lapland, and the benefit always goes to the long and wide table of the southern man._

The lords of the South have fun all the time. No poor people, women or children live in the South. According to this logic, the most pernicious obstacle to Laplanders’ happiness is a young, male, urban intellectual, a sort of Homo Helsinkiensis, whose predominant aim is to empty Lapland of its indigenous inhabitants and make it into a conservation and nature reserve with no human settlement – once again.

In reality, of course, Lapland is not just one compact and homogeneous cultural region with localised colourful eccentricities. There are many everyday Laplands, just as there are many Souths, Finlands and Europes. In Finnish
Lapland, there are three spoken Sámi languages, different Finnish dialects and regional identities, family and place names, different emphases in livelihoods, religion, material culture and architecture.

[The sky and earth of Lapland]

At the core of the Sámi worldview in particular has been the traditional nature religion that included the shaman institution (noaidi in Sámi, noita in Finnish) that was all-important to the community in many respects – even though Regnard in the previously cited story ridiculed it. The encounter with the Christian priests was mostly peaceful but not always beneficial to the receiving party. The great shamans and their most important ritualistic artefacts, the drums, were lost. The Christian clergymen participated in systematically eradicating the shaman institution.

There are signs of Catholic Christianity on the coast of Norway from the middle Ages and of Orthodox Christianity in Finnish Lapland prior to the 17th century. However, when speaking of the Christianisation of the Nordic countries and introducing them to European or Latin culture, the fact that the northernmost parts of them were introduced to Christian culture slowly and gradually only from the 16th to the beginning of the 20th century from both east and west is often forgotten in the general interpretation of history.

The Lutheran missionary work in Lapland started, ultimately, at the decree of the Swedish protestant central authority. This process was complicit with the Arctic Sea and Lapland settlement policies of the king of Sweden, touching both the indigenous peoples and settlers of the area, their worldviews, livelihoods, their ways of life and the social structures of the communities in manifold ways.

Today also, two branches of Christianity meet in the Sámi area; Protestantism and Orthodoxy that spread to north-west Russia, the Kola Peninsula and Petsamo in the 16th century. After World War I, by the Treaty of Tartu of 1920,
Petsamo with its Orthodox monastery became a part of Finland, and in the final stages of World War II the Orthodox Skolt Sámi population, as well as the monastery community were evacuated to Finland. Even among the Sámi minority, the Skolts have been a religious and linguistic minority that the mainstream culture nearly managed to destroy in the decades after the war by its policy of active forgetting.

In the 19th and early 20th century the Laestadian revivalist movement gained a central position in North. Vicar and preacher Lars Levi Laestadius, I mentioned before while quoting Marmier, was born in Luleå Lapland in Sweden, and he was Sámi by heritage, cultural background and mother tongue. When he became the Karesuvanto minister he had to learn Finnish as his sermon language – an exuberant and even coarse language of the common people that could reach his audience in a completely different way from the sermons of “the ministers of the South”.

Besides the vicar and dean of the Kaareuvanto parish, Laestadius was (now I quote Laestadius himself) “— knight of the French Légion d’honneur, member of the Royal Society of Sciences in Uppsala, member of the Stockholm Hunters Union and member of the Edinburgh Botanical Society in England ——”. But his most important and powerful successors as preachers and teachers of “true protestant Christianity” were humble, uneducated and pious Sámi, and Swedish and Finnish laymen.

In 1844 Laestadius published Táluts Suptsasah (Old tales about God and people) in Sámi. This was a freely narrated interpretation of the Old Testament that became popular reading in the Sámi areas. In his foreword Laestadius referred to how difficult it was for the nomad Reindeer Sámi to carry a big Bible with them on their annual treks to the coast of the Arctic Ocean, and back to their inland winter villages, and thus defended having published this little popular storybook.

Literature researcher Kari Sallamaa also identifies an ethnic reason for publishing the book: The wild, bloody tales are the mythology of Jews –
another group of people on the periphery – the Sámi had their own. However, the Palestinian nomad life seemed familiar to the Fell Sámi reindeer herders. When telling about Abraham and Lot, Laestadius explained how they had a round-up when there was not enough lichen for both of their herds. So Lot left for new pastures and built his “winter village hut” near Sodom.

The down-to-earth rhetoric of Laestadius can here be studied not only as a clever pedagogical technique and cultural translation, “making sense” of the Old Testament story, but also as emancipatory claiming of one’s own physical and mental space.

In the culture and society, even politics, of Lapland, Laestadianism in its different forms still is a strong – but not the only one – force. Especially among the landless people and some Sámi communities, in time the movement and factions that split from it developed radical, even militant, features that were connected with the experience of social injustice and opposition to the authorities imported from the South – to which the clergymen of the church were seen to belong. One may have found portraits of Lars Levi Laestadius and Vladimir Iljits Lenin next to each other on the wall of a home in some areas of the North Calotte.

Referring to the Norwegian researcher of Laestadianism Roald E. Kristiansen, Professor Veli-Pekka Lehtola has suggested a new perspective on the study of northern religiousness. He calls it spiritual ecology. According to Kristiansen, researchers should be more ready to understand the experience of northernness as a particular spiritual phenomenon that has a specific influence on northern people and their society.

Kristiansen has attempted to articulate the way people and nature intertwine in a complex network of existence, and how they create a close relationship between nature and both the cultural and mental landscape. According to Lehtola, cultural researchers should take seriously the faith and conviction that there is more than what is immediately apparent:
Even the critical researcher should not forget that living in the North as a human being for many still means facing the transcendent. It entails the experience of life being given and taken. People cannot be rulers of their lives themselves. Therefore people try to build their identity so that amidst everyday life there is a place or space that supports the bond with the unsaid and unexplained.

[People have lived and read in Lapland too]

We live in Europe, and our home country is Finland, with the land of Russia in the east and south, the land of Sweden in the west, and the land of Norway and the barren Lapland in the North.

("Barren“ = in Finnish "leivätön“ = no wheat ‡ no bread.)

These coordinates were given to Finnish children for the construction of cultural identity by the Children’s primer or the New ABC in 1869. However, at that time the ABC was also read in “barren Lapland”. A functioning catechist school system had been created in the sparsely populated area, and a year after the book had been published, the first primary school was opened in Finnish Lapland. Barley was also grown on the settlement farms. The people in Lapland were governed by the same laws, paid taxes and obeyed the same authorities as the rest of the subjects of the Grand Duchy of Finland as best they could – or wished – and they had their own representatives in the diet.

As I browse the history atlas of my own schooldays published nearly a hundred years after the Children’s primer, I notice the same thing: when looking at Finnish settlement history from the Stone and Bronze Ages to the 17th century, the maps show one half of Finland. Lapland does not exist on these maps even though the subject is the settlement history of the entire current Finland. This does not mean that Lapland was uninhabited up to the 17th century, but rather that the lifestyle of the people of the North, based on
hunting, fishing and nomadism, was not considered “settlement”, even at the beginning of the 1960s.

Furthermore, the state borders have not always divided northernmost Fennoscandia (North Calotte) as they do now. Until the 19th century, there were no set borders between Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia in the north. The nomads, hunting and fishing Sámi, Finns, Norwegians, Swedes and Russians moving to and from the coast of the Arctic Sea could move freely in the area. Tax collectors also came there from various quarters. The population moved to fish on the coast of the Arctic Sea from further south when famine or other problems arose, or compelled by their dreams. Some came from the east or the south to trade, others to start a new life and some just to try their luck. Goods and their use moved along with the arrivals. It was a multiethnic, multilingual and, finally, also very multinational, and as such a very distinctive cultural region evolved over the centuries. It developed its own original survival strategies and operational networks. It also clearly differed from the southern main cultures of the motherlands.

The change began during the 18th and 19th centuries, and as a result, according to Finnish historian Maria Lähteenmäki, “Finnish Lapland” was born in a current geopolitical sense.

A concrete and profound shift occurred when Finland was annexed to Russian Empire in 1809 and the border was extended to the Torne River between Finland and Sweden in the middle of a linguistically and culturally homogeneous Finnish region. An interesting example of the policy of memory and forgetting is related to the Treaty of Hamina in particular.

The Finnish War between Sweden and Russia in 1808–1809 imposed heavy civilian and military duties on the population in the Torne Valley where the new border between Russia and Sweden was extended, and it was followed by hunger, disease and a crushing population catastrophe that Finnish historiography has, with few exceptions, ignored. They were not discussed in
the festivities marking the common “jubilee” of Finland and Sweden that was celebrated by the political and cultural elite a year ago.

The aggressive language policy in the Finnish-speaking Torne Valley that remained on the Swedish side has neither received the same level of attention as the language rights of the Finnish immigrants and their descendents in southern Sweden. The President of Finland also neglected the former when she spoke out for the latter in Stockholm in the “jubilee” celebrations in January 2009.

Subsequently the defining of the boundaries between Finland and Norway/Sweden and Finland and the Soviet Union closed the paths of the Sámi nomads and relegated the hitherto more or less unified and independent area to the periphery of the mother states. Even families were split up into different nationalities. Thus, even peacetime boundary redefinition violently disrupted the everyday lives of people in Lapland. The old Sámi saying “the family ties, the state divides” still reflects this.

The integration of the border areas as part of the nation-state and the overarching culture also began at this time. After Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917 this development intensified still further as the common and centrally maintained identity of the young nation was being created and supported.

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1 The main character Matti in the novel Popular music from Vittula by the author from Pajala, Mikael Niemi, ponders a situation where a generation tries to build its identity somewhere between the proscribed and the prescribed: “We gradually caught on to the fact that where we lived wasn’t really a part of Sweden. We’d just been sort of tagged by accident. – – Ours was a childhood of deprivation. Not material deprivation – we had enough to get by on – but a lack of identity. We were nobody. Our parents were nobody. Our forefathers had made no mark whatsoever on Swedish history. Our last names were unspellable, not to mention being unpronounceable for the few substitute teachers who found their way up north from the real Sweden. None of us dared to write in to Children’s Family Favorites because Swedish Radio would think we were Finns. Our home villages were too small to appear on maps. – – We spoke with a Finnish accent without being Finnish, and we spoke with a Swedish accent without being Swedish. We were nothing.” Niemi 2004 (2000), 48–49.
During the centuries distinctive building cultures have developed in Lapland – Lapp villages, Southern Lapland yards, village communities, market places, centres of trade, population centres, sawmills and mills, of which unfortunately few have survived to the present. Buildings were mostly made out of wood in Lapland until World War II and the older building structure has been destroyed over time.

The expression “Winter and Continuation War”, which is established in the Finnish historical discourse, erases the War of Lapland from the national memory of the Second World War.

In the final stages of the Second World War in the autumn of 1944 when the rest of Finland had already begun reconstruction and not many even seemed to understand that Lapland was still in a full-blown war. Finnish Lapland – and the northernmost parts of Norway as well – collectively experienced a material, mental and cultural catastrophe when the German troops destroyed virtually the entire material and infra structure of the province. Private homes, public buildings, churches and vicarages alike were burnt. At the same time a large part of the roads, bridges and railways were destroyed and/or mined. In many population centres even more than 90 per cents of buildings were destroyed.

In the devastated area of Northern Finland, altogether 21 600 buildings had been built or repaired by 1953, 76 per cent of which in the countryside were new buildings. The massive reconstruction of housing during a grave deficiency of materials in a short period of time, through a co-ordinated planning project changed the northern material and mental landscape in a drastic way.

During the devastation, the population of Lapland – over 100 000 people – was evacuated to Northern Sweden and further south to Finland, and returning home meant returning to a material zero. The domestic furniture,
textiles, lamps, dishes, household, agricultural and reindeer equipment, clothing, bed linen, books, photographs and toys etc. were destroyed. The cultural shock was greatest for the Sámi who, returning to their home district brought with them new ways, clothing and material culture. An unprecedentedly radical breach had occurred in the perpetual continuum.

For many Finns and Sámi the destruction of their home meant losing the connection – all-important for identity – to their own past. This connection originates from and lives among others in habits, artefacts, places, spaces, and landscapes that carry memories and emotional experiences.

Historian Maria Lähteenmäki has called for revisiting the interpretations on the War of Lapland and the destruction of the province, in relation to the political decisions that were made in the autumn of 1940 allowing German troop’s passage, and to the co-operation agreement made with Germany in the summer of 1940. In Lähteenmäki’s opinion it would be naive to think that the northern people had not noticed the overall situation of the war: Lapland was abandoned as an area of operations to German soldiers, so that the rest of the country and Karelia could be saved.

She compares this to a situation where parents give up their younger child to keep the older one: “When the older and more beloved one was taken against the will of the parents anyway, the younger, mentally and physically broken one was taken back into the family.”

Compared with the Karelian national landscape, the barren and remote Lapland had remained unfamiliar and its meaning was vague to the people of “actual Finland”. In addition, the war experience in Lapland had taken a profoundly different shape from the Finnish war experience which is generally thought of as homogeneous. The latter ignored the former which carries a profound sense of inequality.

A collective trauma threatens not only the feeling of continuity of an individual but also that of a community and a culture. “Also the lifeline of a culture
breaks if a traumatic event too abruptly reveals too much of value and taken for granted to have been lost for good" states psychotherapist Soili Hautamäki. The devastation caused by the War can, in a way, be said to have broken the lifeline of the culture of Lapland, when it very abruptly revealed to the inhabitants of the province that a great deal that had been self-evidently taken for granted had been lost: alongside the material and social destruction, collective self-esteem and trust in national equality were also destroyed. Reconstructing these is difficult and progress is slow.

[Northern cultural history and the narcissistic balance of culture]

Northern cultural history can in a way be seen having become a part of the mental reconstruction of Lapland, which still seems to be uncompleted. Northern cultural history seeks alternative levels and ways of articulation, transition and breaching points from old research frames, and new possibilities for positioning and stances. The teaching and research projects of northern cultural history deliberately attempt to deconstruct the given centre–periphery dichotomy and to seek a new, rather emancipatory research method instead of repeating the iconic clichés – whether they are related to the exoticising perception of the Sámi, other stereotypes about Lapland, Lapland tourism or the poverty discourse about the migration and the emptying of Lapland.

Referring to northern cultural history, my colleague professor Kari Immonen has argued that periphery exists only in people’s minds. The idea may seem unreasonable to the people of Lapland who for decades have waited to be included in the TV and radio broadcasting area one channel at a time and who still remain outside of the mobile phone network even though the landline network is being demolished, and who have to give birth to their children hundreds of kilometres away from home. However, I agree. There isn’t any essential periphery, as there is no essential otherness. Periphery does not exist: it is made. A reasonable question to ask is also from whose mind came the idea of the North as periphery. The people of Lapland did not know they
were living in periphery where “the world terminates”, as Jean-François Regnard put it, until people from the South came to tell it to them.

There have long been discussions about the colonisation of the Arctic region in Finland and other Nordic countries. The greatest disagreements in both research and policy forums have been over the question of how to approach the inclusion of Lapland in the settlement and thus the use and ownership of land, of old Lapp villages, the hunting, fishing and reindeer herding Sámi and the settlers, as well as the rights to practise their livelihoods. History has a strong presence and generates high passions both in science and other public discourses and political decision-making.

It has also been suggested that European postcolonial theory has been forcefully and rigidly imposed on the northern study of history, producing an interpretation of history that has nothing to do with the northern reality as disclosed by documentary sources.

These various dynamics have aroused and will continue to generate necessary debate over a constellation of questions: What is the nature of the relationship between ethnic groups of the northernmost Fennoscandia, and between the local people and the authorities and their use of power; what kinds of historico-political interests influence the various interpretations, and with what kinds of tools can those interests be made visible; what kind of hidden colonialism does the tourism industry of Lapland still produce and how could its strategies be deconstructed through research?

And on the other hand, how effectively does, for example, postcolonial and orientalist discourse help us to understand and conceptualise the encounters, oppression and survival strategies of the ethnic and other social groups of the Arctic region? What generally is or should be the role of theory in interpreting the past and present experiences of living in the world and encountering regional and local polyphonic and multiethnic communities that scarcely conform to theoretical models that were meant to be universal?
In the northern cultural history in general – as far as I can understand in a more or less similar way as with women and gender history and history of indigenous people, ethnic and cultural minorities – four successive and also partly overlapping phases can be seen:

1) The phase of the history of misery.
2) The phase of the heroic history, or, in this case, the history of northern enlightenment, progress and modernisation.
3) The phase of a post colonial history, revealing and deconstructing stereotypes and iconic clichés, related to the northern people, culture and history both in policy, economics, education, culture and historiography.
4) The phase one can call the northern turn. That is the history of agency and emancipation that turns the colonial and touristic gaze into the gaze of the object itself, toward the tourist and coloniser. This turn challenges the history of misery, the heroic history, and the post colonial approach, too, and asks, as my colleague, the professor of Sámi culture Veli-Pekka Lehtola said me about ten years ago: “Now we have revealed the stereotypes and colonisation and it’s about time we ask: so what???

A few weeks ago he wrote in his article:

*Studying the external effect and healing the wounds of colonialism is important but we must be able to study the history of the Sámi in a context other than colonisation as well. Thus the view shifts to the Sámi themselves and peeks behind the picture painted by the sources. Who were the people that the comers met in the field? What did the Sámi themselves do and how did they relate to the comers and what else did they do in their lives?*

This goes not only to the Sámi but also to other inhabitants of the north. Here, the object becomes the subject, and the periphery turns into the *creative margin*, as Natalie Zemon Dawis would have put it.
If the word “periphery” is used at all in northern cultural history anymore, it is seen more as an ethnocentric tool of the user of the term, than a given and essential state of otherness – keeping in mind Giovanni Levi’s note about how many significant things happen even when it seems, when seen from elsewhere, that nothing is happening.

Finnish historian Pentti Renvall has stated that culture means in an essential way that the past lives in us. This cannot mean simply that the past influences our present, or that we live in the past. It also means that we are aware of it and seek to discover how and why the past influences our present. Otherwise we cannot deconstruct the mental and social structures that for centuries have defined centre and periphery, object and subject, what is worth remembering and what may be forgotten. That requires a knowledge of and respect for northern cultural history.

In critically contemplating the strategies of oppression, forgetting and emancipation, northern cultural history must, in any case, attend to an area that a historian of settlements, justice, land rights, ownership and land use, does not necessarily notice or even look for in the documents: the colonisation of the mind, and of history.