Introduction
In the mid-1990’s I created the Olania simulation as an opportunity for peacebuilding practitioners to study the dynamics of deep-rooted social conflict and practice dialogic interventions.

Olania (o-lah’-nee-ah) is a proto-typical fictitious country in which two ethnic groups, the Olans (o’-lahns) and the Vihacs (vee’-hocks), have been locked in a seesawing power struggle and violent conflict over generations. When asked what real countries Olania sounds like, participants in the simulation often answer, “Israel and Palestine,” “Guatemala,” “Sri Lanka,” “Bosnia,” “Cyprus,” and more. In short, Olania highlights common dynamics in conflicts seen around the world, and as such, makes an ideal laboratory in which practitioners can directly experience those patterns and the possibilities for resolution and transformation in such situations.

The roles suggested for the simulation are likewise generic in nature. Feel free to eliminate some roles or create new ones.

Uses of the Olania Simulation
This simulation can work as a training tool in a variety of flexible formats. It can be a classroom exercise in Peace and Conflict Studies academic programs, a stand-alone professional development program, part of a conference, as an intervention in a particular conflict, and more.

It can be a read-and-discuss exercise or a full-blown simulation (extended role-play), lasting anywhere from a few hours to a few days. Character development can be minimal (a few minutes at the beginning of the simulation) or extensive (creating a back-story, deep analysis of motives and possibilities for change). New roles can be added, or suggested roles can be dropped if there are not enough people in the simulation to cover all of them.

In short, Olania is a flexible vehicle for learning, easily adaptable to various circumstances.

The Context of the Olania Simulation
The simulation operates within this context: A team of facilitators associated with a conflict resolution/peacebuilding organization based in Washington DC has secured a grant to bring a small group of Olans and Vihacs together in Washington for a multi-day dialogue/training session in conflict resolution. These facilitators have been to Olania, where they met many of the participants and learned firsthand some of the dynamics of the conflict there. The simulation consists of various sessions of that dialogue, plus preparation and de-briefing time.
How to Run an *Olania* Simulation
When using this as an extended role-play, I have followed this pattern:

1. Preparation
   - Distribute the background paper describing Olania
   - Give participants time to read and absorb, even overnight if possible
   - Go over the history and current situation in Olania
   - Discuss the key geographic circumstances of the conflict
   - Adjust the roles to be used based on the number of people in the game
   - Talk about the power of role-play, and the fact that it can be deeply emotionally stimulating, which may be difficult for participants who have experienced war-related or other personal trauma
   - Invite any who feel that taking a role as an Olan or Vihac is not appropriate for them, for that or any other reason, to volunteer to be either a Facilitator or a Researcher
   - Invite volunteers for two Facilitator roles and however many Researchers
   - Distribute roles to remaining players in random fashion, with suggestion that even though the role assignments are random, players usually find some personal learning or meaning in the role they play – because that character may be very like them, very unlike them, or actually abhorrent to them
   - Instruct everyone to remember that the dialogue is not meant to be a negotiation session to ‘solve’ the conflict, but rather a meeting to learn about one another and learn about conflict resolution

2. Initial Caucus – 1 hour +/-
   - Ask Olan, Vihac, Facilitators, and Researchers to meet in their separate groups to prepare themselves
   - In the Olan and Vihac groups, players are to help each other make the transition from their real identity to their role by, for instance
     - Giving themselves a role-related name
     - Creating a back story for their character
     - Sharing some of their role instructions (or not, as some are meant to be secret)
     - Discussing, in role, what their hopes and strategies might be for an upcoming meeting with the others
   - Researchers use this time to prepare their methodology – what will they be looking for?
   - Facilitators use this time to prepare for the dialogue, including setting up the physical space

3. Ambassador’s Reception (optional) – 20 minutes +/-
   - Instructor plays the Ambassador of Olania based in Washington DC, who has invited the participants to a reception before their dialogue begins
   - Have real food and drink available, if possible
   - Ambassador gives very short address, welcoming the Olan and Vihac and offering best wishes for their upcoming conflict resolution workshop
• Players in role, including Facilitators, informally mix, as at a cocktail party
• Researchers observe

4. First Dialogue Session – 1 hour 15 minutes +/-
• Facilitators invite players into meeting space
• Facilitators set the goals and norms of the session and facilitate the dialogue
• Researchers observe
• Instructor keeps the time and stops the session at an appropriate moment

5. First De-Brief Session – 1 hour 15 minutes +/-
• Players are instructed to come out of role, shake out that persona, and resume their normal identity
• Instructor invites reflections
  o Can be wide open for anyone to speak
  o Or can be done by groups: Olans, Vihacs, Facilitators
  o Researchers share their findings
• Instructor can identify ‘teachable moments’ to share small pieces of theory or other input
• Instructor should be aware that the dynamics of the dialogue tend to be very engaging, and that players tend to stay somewhat in role during these sessions to keep the it going. If and when that happens, instructor therefore needs to remind players to come back to a reflection mode

6. Continuing Sessions
• Alternate Dialogue Sessions with De-Brief Sessions – as many as fit the time allotted
• Instructor can use discretion to change the play – for instance:
  o Intersperse more caucus times
  o Invite players to organize themselves into small affinity groups (in role) based on shared interests (after enough dialogue rounds that this seems useful)
  o Introduce news alerts – for instance, the Colonel's house has just been firebombed, or mass graves have been discovered, etc.
  o Accelerate the time – for instance, ‘It is now three days later and you are preparing to go back to Olania...’

7. Final De-Brief Session – 1 hour +/-
• Make sure everyone is thoroughly out of role – physical shaking out, laughing, saying ‘goodbye,’ taking off name tags, or other activities are helpful
• Configure various formats to reflect on learning; for instance:
  o Small groups to discuss what they learned about deep-rooted conflict and conflict resolution/transformation
  o Pairs or dyads to reflect on what they learned about themselves personally from their roles
Large group to share key take-aways from the simulation
• Be alert for any players who may be having trouble coming out of role, or in emotional distress

**Special Notes for Instructors**

The *Olania* simulation can be an extremely powerful experience for people personally and professionally, one that many remember and learn from for months or even years afterward. Instructors need to conduct this exercise with strong attention to providing safe space, clear task and role boundaries, appropriate guidance, and emotional support as needed. It helps to remember the three P’s that define good leadership:

• Permission – Big feelings and strong differences of opinion may arise, and that’s okay
• Protection – I will make sure there is an atmosphere where that can happen safely
• Potency – I have the power/potency to provide that protection

*Olania* is designed to be run as a simulated dialogue session for learning about conflict dynamics and relationships. However, instructors with specific models and training agendas (for instance, negotiation skills or problem-solving workshops) can modify the simulation to conform to those formats. It’s important to make the model and task clear at the beginning, and may be necessary to continually remind players if and when they move into another mode.

If run properly, there should be as much learning for the instructor as for the players.

This simulation is rich with learning possibilities, and might be full of surprises. It can also be fun. Enjoy!