Transforming Classrooms into Tropical Islands:
Simulation Games as Teaching Tools in Anthropology

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Abstract

This article argues that simulation, surprise, and suspense are effective tools in undergraduate Anthropology classrooms. In my experience, role playing can motivate students to engage more critically in the course readings, develop deeper interest in the subject matter, and build a better learning community. Real-life interaction should not be underrated as we incorporate current trends in on-line teaching and "blended" courses into our syllabi. In support of this argument, I present my experiences with a simulation game that I have been developing since 2002. By describing its setup as a framing narrative for the entire semester and discussing the pros and cons, I hope to generate a discussion about the benefits and challenges of role playing in undergraduate classrooms.

Introduction: Role-play in Undergraduate Anthropology Classrooms

The material I present in this article responds to the more recent calls for experiential, embodied learning as an effective strategy to engage students. I argue that simulation games can help university students to understand, digest, process and apply course material. Undergraduate Anthropology classes, especially ethnographic area courses, are perfect locations for simulation games because they invite students to connect with a foreign place and its peoples in experiential ways. In role playing, students empathetically come to realize that the "exotic other" is not so different from them, not suspended in time and space (Fabian 1983). By "switching sides", my students become more open to course content, achieve better critical reading skills. The large majority of participants clearly enjoy the class – the role play creates interest, even in a lecture or student presentation. I have observed this all five times I have used simulation approaches.[i]

As I will show in the following discussion, simulation, suspense, and surprise have transformed my classrooms into tropical islands. By sharing my experiences with *The Tribe*, a role-playing game of my own invention, I hope to encourage more experimental teaching and an ongoing exchange of ideas on this exciting learning method. In this essay, I first introduce the simulation game as a teaching method and consider ways to incorporate it into undergraduate courses. Second, I describe the purpose of simulation as a framing narrative in my second-year class on "The Ethnography of New Guinea"[ii]. Third, I present reasons for the success of this approach. I conclude by recommending the adoption and adaptation of *The Tribe* to my colleagues, in order to educate and amuse more undergraduate anthropology classrooms.

Simulation as a Teaching Tool

As "[t]eaching and learning are among the most complex activities in which human beings engage, and neither is fully understood" (Scott 2007:212), I am committed to designing courses that build on a variety of learning styles. Simulation games are an exciting way to support such a learning environment. My students' evaluations indicate that lectures, group-work, presentations and films become more

relevant to them when the knowledge acquired from these activities can be applied in a semester-long simulation game that frames the course.

Role-playing may seem old-fashioned in the light of innovative technologies. New technologies in "blended" learning formats are currently advocated as the *non-plus-ultra* of student-centred teaching and learning, serving the Web-Generation's "short attention spanning, highly engaged" communicative practices (Rotenberg 2010:63). While there are clearly many advantages to web-based learning formats in today's world of web-focussed students, Rotenberg is right to suggest that improving upon our technological set-up is only <u>one</u> way of engaging our students. I believe firmly that student-centred learning can be achieved without computers and that face-to-face contact in a real-life classroom provides a greater variety of learning options, I have experimented with various simulation games. Below, I focus on *The Tribe*, a role game that is designed for an ethnographic area course in which my students assume the roles of villagers. By drawing on the human preference for structured, hierarchical groups, the kinship-based *Tribe* motivates high levels of student engagement and enthusiasm (as "a fun way of learning") even among students of the Web-Generation. *The Tribe* is an academic (learning-based) game "in which players are given a simulated environment in which to play, giving them an insight into the object system or process simulated" (Cruickshank and Telfer 1980:76).

Games and simulations are relatively new to university settings. They have gained popularity for school children and pre-service teachers only since the mid-1960s (Cruickshank and Telfer 1980:75). A classic 5th grade board game like *Caribou Hunt* has the potential to teach basic hunting strategies such as team work and a deeper understanding of "what it was like to have been a Netsilek Eskimo hunter trying to survive in a barren land" (Cruickshank and Telfer 1980:77). In the 1980s, the first simulation games found an entry into the social sciences (Cruickshank and Telfer 1980:76). Such games can be computer-based role games or in-class activities as long as they are able to provide cohesion and consequentiality, "thus affording trajectories that bind ideologies to actualities that communicate a message" (Barab et al. 2010:244). Simulation games are empowering for students because of their "explicit and deliberate positioning of students as audience to, performer within, and author of the narrative, situates them such that their actions make their identity claims visible and consequential" (Barab et al. 2010:244). Playing a character role in a partially fictional problem context can foster a state of engagement and allow students to see broader, structural dynamics that impact their lives' forces (Greenfield 2006:404). In a role game context, players can "try on, act out, and commit to roles, morals, ideologies" (Barab et al. 2010:245) and experiment within a learner-centred world which provides safety and encouragement.

These advantages appear to be related to ownership over the learned material, "since students have a greater likelihood of success when the material is 'theirs' instead of just 'ours'"(Greenfield 2006:404). In a simulation, the whole person is engaged and connected to the other players. The use of sensations, emotions, rational thinking, movements and language create a more exciting and memorable learning experience and students are very appreciative of the "fun" side of learning: "I remembered things a lot better because of the tribe", as a student put it in the 2012 feedback survey. These socio-emotional aspects of learning had been undervalued in academia until the 1990s. This seems to be a lost opportunity for student engagement. According to Greenfield, experiential learning that fosters socio-emotional involvement can provide "the context for students to utilize affective elements as a catalyst for simulating enhanced motivation for learning and comprehension of course material is critically important" (2006:404). *The Tribe*, as I will demonstrate below, clearly profits from these pedagogical effects and creates what could be called a "Laboratory of the Unexpected". The course is a highlight in many participants' student careers and while role-playing contributes to less than half of class time, it stands out in former participants' memories. Students report that shifting their role from student to villager is a "fun thing to do" that motivates them to engage more in the other course components. They also claim that it is worth talking about outside of class ("My family is getting sick of my PNG stories", as a student commented in the 2012 feedback survey). A student from the 2002 *Tribe* acknowledged the class as a "root" for her decision to become an anthropologist in her first book (Mackenrodt 2011: i).

To set up a classroom of relatives is useful for face-to-face societies; other applications of simulation games are only limited by our creativity. I can recommend a *Tribe*-like simulation for ethnographic area courses as well as for a variety of topical classes. I have so far used the idea for The Anthropology of Cyberspace, organizing the class into "Cyberislands" which represent internet sites like Facebook. One of my colleagues has created "Nations" in a course on Nationalism. Giving students some room for role playing implies a less controlling teaching style and openness to student creativity. In my experience, this does not reduce the authority of the professor – academic hierarchies are well established in our students' minds – but eliminates the suffocating passiveness of bored students.

Where the Wild Ones Are – an Example of a Framing Simulation Game

My pedagogic motivation for designing a simulation game for The Ethnography of New Guinea, a 2nd-year course in Anthropology, was to deconstruct the image of the islanders as "savages" which persists in popular culture and presumably in the minds of most of my students. Given that "all curricular design work must be considered ideological in nature" (Barab et al. 2010:243) and hence requires reflection on teaching and learning priorities, the course uses simulation as a tool to encourage empathy and reflection within wider social contexts, aiming to further the academic, social and moral development of my students. Building a simulation on kinship, seniority and gender, I attempt to make structural forces visible in a climate where most students have "internalized the dominant ideological perspective of personal responsibility" (Greenfield 2006:404). In *The Tribe*, every student receives a new personality, which defines age, gender, and personal qualities that include everybody in a relative system of rank. Students learn to fit into the (relatively egalitarian) hierarchy as they critically analyse structures and cultural principles that apply to their simulation. From there, it is a smaller step to more vigorous reflections on power relations, personhood, cosmology, exchange, change, and other key principles of human societies. Most Anthropology courses address these topics in one way or another, and simulations could work well to explain any society's institutions, morals, and other key principles.

Taking an ethnographic area course is beneficial to students as it demonstrates the diversity of human constructions of reality and ideally causes reflections on assumed truths and received wisdom in their own lives. I would argue that a framing simulation game can take these reflections a step further by directly involving the students as actors. While any region could become a *Tribe*, New Guinea provides an ideal ethnographic background to discuss human universals and specifics, and to question paradigms, cosmologies, ideas of gender roles and forms of political organizations. An area course on the island of New Guinea needs to confront the stereotypical representation of "savages" in the media. The national airline's touristic slogan "The Land of the Unexpected," for instance, draws on exotic imagery (such as women breastfeeding piglets, human babies sleeping in net bags hung on a tree, warriors with fierce masks, costumes that leave little room for imagination and human skulls that are supposedly the leftovers of a cannibal meal). As I said above, deconstructing these stereotypes and replacing them with more appropriate images is the most basic goal of the course. While cannibalism, magic, topless girls and tribal warfare may be exciting and effective ways of inciting student interest, I do not teach my students about an exotic "Other" but rather invite them to engage in the course material on the basis of sameness (as human beings). *The Tribe* supports this strategy by creating kin-like relations between and among students from various cultural backgrounds and the far away islanders of New Guinea.

The island of New Guinea has attracted many anthropologists and for over a century now has been central in anthropological theory. Ethnographically it is one of the most complex areas of the world – there are over eight hundred languages, not including dialects – and any attempt to "cover" such a culturally dense area within thirteen weeks is doomed to fail. If I was teaching in the Pacific region, ethnographic detail of specific language groups would dominate the course to a greater extent, but to my undergraduate students in Germany and the Canadian prairies, New Guinea is a very exotic,

"savage," and mysterious location. Teaching my students the variety and choices in social organization makes more sense than, say, discussing the differences between local groups in any specific way. Cross-cousin marriage among the Trobriand Islanders may be an interesting and broadly discussed topic in Anthropology but the time needed to explain how it supposedly works is better spent, as I see it, letting students feel the difference between a descent group ("my clan") and a corporate group ("my village"). It is my goal to build a group that interacts "in character" whenever possible, bonding against outsiders and feeling in similar ways as their real counterparts in New Guinea perhaps do.

Playing a role in *The Tribe* helps students to reflect on cross-cultural differences and their implications by assuming a new gendered "identity." Teaching about structural effects of gender roles by letting students experience an alternate gender allows them to see that gender is a cultural construction rather than a biological given. Since the roles in *The Tribe* are distributed in a gender-blind fashion, a male student may impersonate a woman and *vice versa*, thus learning how sex and gender can be constructed in various ways in different cultures. The positive effects of this exercise have also become apparent in my 3rd-year course, The Anthropology of Gender, where I have noticed that former *Tribe* participants easily grasp different gender constructions, such as Fa'afine in Samoa (these are men who live as women). In many cases, a student will remember the kinship relation that tied them together during *Tribe* time and not their fellow student's actual name (the relation typically phrased as: "He was my mother in our *Tribe*").

Teaching students about structures of hierarchy is another goal of this class. The political systems in New Guinea are mostly based on seniority and personal prestige. Chiefs may or may not exist and their level of influence varies. Of course, face-to-face groups mainly run through consensus are a typical feature in the students' own lives, too, and reflecting on power structures, strategies and patterns of decision-making in *The Tribe* allows for experiments in leadership. A shy student who became a senior male in *The Tribe*, for example, grew into her role and became more confident in front of the class as the term went on, clearly satisfying my pedagogical goal of empowering students to think about, and test, strategies to further their personality. Just as they become aware of the ways they "do" gender every day, they have the opportunity to "try" leadership.

To provide a critical view on social media coverage, I post relevant material (blogs and vlogs, newspaper clippings, websites, You Tube links to films and music) on the course website (a *Moodle*-based tool). Active engagement in "Forum" discussions and other web-based activities is strongly encouraged, forming half of the participation grade (7.5 %). The website can be replaced by in-class discussions without role play, to give those students who are positioned in more submissive and silent *Tribe*-roles additional chances to express themselves out of character. However, I prefer to spend more time on role-play and discussions within *The Tribe* to strengthen character identification and enhance clan solidarity.

Larger educational goals, like critical reading skills and a reflexive engagement with mass media require an open-minded and inquisitive view. The simulation games take up less than half of our contact time; the rest of the time consists of more conventional teaching styles, such as lectures, student presentations and discussions, and films. The material covered in mandatory readings and lectures is tested in two exams. Moreover, every student has to present on one of the readings and provide a handout which is shared on the course website. The topic of the take-home essay (of 2000 words) is based on the student's main field of interest and I am available as support at all stages of essay writing. Although active participation in *The Tribe* accounts only for a small portion of their final grade (less than 10%), students seem more keen to attend class and engage in independent library research than they are in other classes that I teach without a framing game[iii]. I think that students realize that reading texts gives them more authority as clan members.

To accomplish these goals in a variety of teaching formats, my role as a teacher shifts between lecturer, background advisor, role-player, ethnographer and "goddess" (when setting up certain activities in *The*

Tribe). Outside of lectures, and when the "goddess" has given her instructions/visions, I step out of the limelight and offer students agency and ownership of the learned material (see also Cruickshank and Telfer 1980:79). I assume the role of observer, mainly walking around the class to answer questions and occasionally volunteering options or a short anecdote. This role is closely tied to my fieldwork experiences "linking confessional narratives to academic discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material" (Jacobs 1998:21).

I work hard to create an inclusive classroom, encouraging honest and open discourse by offering relevant examples from the literature and my own life and encouraging students to share their experiences as well. Talking about initiation rituals, for example, once incited a discussion on the benefits of suffering. Some of the tattooed, pierced, branded and/or tongue-split class participants, and some mothers shared empowering experiences of pain which helped to contextualize the readings on empathy and to clarify the role of pain during coming-of-age. In this particular course, foreign students tend to open up and share their experiences, especially when they come from tropical countries and can relate to New Guinea's climate conditions, plants, and lifestyles. Building relationships in the simulation clearly helps for real-life bonding between classmates, a strong argument for using this tool in undergraduate classrooms.

Setting up *The Tribe*

<u>Creating Identities</u>
Organized into three intermarried clan groups, each member of *The Tribe* is pre-positioned in terms of age, gender and relatedness[iv]. This set-up enables students to experience the importance of gender, hierarchy, cosmology/religion, colonialism and globalization "in their own skin." Generally, each *Tribe* time begins with a short lecture to introduce the topic, often illustrated by projected images from both New Guinea and from *The Tribe* itself. Debriefing ideally immediately follows the role play, but I often privilege *Tribe* time and complete the debriefing at the beginning of the next class, giving students time to digest their experiences before discussing them and before moving on to a new topic.

At the first class meeting, the participants are asked if they are willing to become *Tribe* members and I explain the syllabus in detail before giving some basic information on New Guinea. The second class meeting marks the birth of the new *Tribe*, announced by the loud sound of a conch shell from New Guinea. Students are encouraged to come to the front and draw a random identity card[v]. By receiving their new "identity" (a personal number, age, gender, and numbers of parents, spouses and/or children) each student is "made into a Papua New Guinean", part of a kinship group (*Tribe*) of no more than 32 persons.[vi]
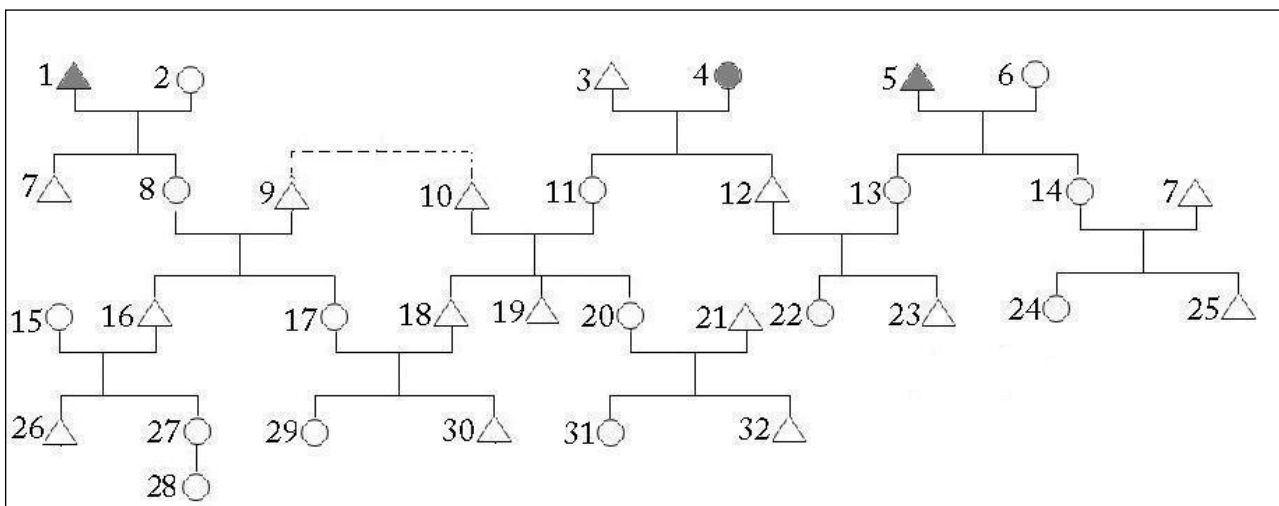

Diagram 1: The "Master plan"

Once the identity cards (see a sample below) are given out, students receive a brief lecture on appropriate behaviour according to age and gender while they study their new "identity." The blanks on this card (name, personal characteristics) are filled out by the students whenever over the course of the semester. The background information on the right side differs from member to member, depending on gender and age. Special characteristics (here, e.g., the health status) were designed in order to provide contexts for additional role games.

Encouraged to get up and find their relatives, students are left relatively un-coached and try out various ways until after some 20 minutes most of the families have worked out their kinship ties. Challenged to produce a kinship diagram (their version of my Master plan), students begin to work in their "family groups," supposedly guided by the elders who eventually realize that calling out numbers helps to identify the individuals; they then typically draw a diagram on the blackboard. Someone finally realizes that all students are related and it is only at that point that I provide the seniors with copies of the "Master" plan (diagram 1).

Identity card of 1	Background Information
Name: Hamlet name: **Gender**: male Lives together with: **Married to**: 2 **Age (approx.):** 80 years Parents: **Children**: 7, 8 Health: Friends: Diligence: Temperament: Skills: Relationships: Respected by:	**Old man:** He does not fish or do any work and needs to be fed and cared for by his relatives. His deep knowledge of myths and magic, as well as land rights, is appreciated but sometimes he is forgetful and disoriented. He knows carving patters and comments on domestic activities such as house repairs and building activities. His network of exchange partners is still active but many of his mates have already passed away. He is generally treated with utmost respect but behind his back his family complains about his old-fashioned opinions and his desire to control everything. He is sick at the moment and not expected to recover. His family is planning ahead and preparing for his death by raising two pigs.

Diagram 2: Identity Card

For this exercise, the students need to learn, practice, and explain kinship terminology. Later in the semester, when referring to kinship-related topics, I use the students as examples for specific types of kinship systems and thus effectively incite their interest as I am "talking about them". *The Tribe* is designed to teach a matrilineal ideology which is difficult for "outsiders" to understand but which ultimately promotes gender equality. Both men and women are leaders when they are old and wise enough and/or when others follow their advice. To initiate elements of secrecy and competition (which exist in every New Guinean society), the class forms three localized matrilineal clans, the descendants of numbers Two, Four and Six. All individuals are to behave according to the social principles that matter most in New Guinea: competence, seniority, and gender. Taking pictures and providing images of each clan in Powerpoint presentation of the *Tribe* is initially important because the role-play depends on knowledge of each others' positions. While the students are working on the kinship challenge, I take mug-shots to add faces to the kinship diagram for future display in short lectures that introduce new *Tribe* time topics. From this second day onwards, students are asked to sit in their clan groups to allow a prompt shift to *Tribe* activities whenever time permits.

The next class meeting with role-play establishes the new-born *Tribe*. Students receive "Clan-tags" with their fellow clan members' faces to wear as necklaces for easy identification. Many objects from my collection of Pacific artefacts are used as prompts, helping to create a more "authentic" atmosphere by giving students the opportunity to wear exotic decorations, to try blowing the conch shell or to use

hand-made artefacts. Toy pigs, carved fish, and tiny baskets from New Guinea are turned into local wealth and objects of exchange when needed. A short lecture on local food and everyday life serves to establish some basic background for developing roles. The students introduce themselves to each other and disclose as much of their personality as they wish (age, family relations and gender are the minimal requirements). Some "joker" characters have special pre-set attributes. One student, for example, becomes the "beachcomber from Regina" who "is a Canadian who fled from civilisation and fell in love with no. 20. He still does not know how to behave and to show respect and is known for getting upset at times for no obvious reason".

Surprise and suspense effectively ensure a sense of excitement and variety amongst students and make the teaching experience enjoyable for me. Both the students and I tend to look forward to class, sharing stories about unexpected events in wider circles and involving others to participate in special roles. My "unexpected" events will be described below, but, as in real life, the students can also announce that they are divorcing, marrying, having babies, being initiated, healing, dying, migrating, going to fight or using magical means of retribution and attraction-seeking. I meet with groups as they plan special feasts or rituals and provide them with class time and supporting information for the "authentic" staging of these events. To give an example, we suffered through, and finally ended, a fight between clans over a little black box in the 2009 *Tribe*, and the negotiation of compensation payments was tough because the groups each felt that they were right.

The Territory of the Tribe: Turning a Classroom into a Tropical "Paradise"
Creating an original landscape of "home" is an important, ongoing process that involves group discussions on the needs and wishes of the clan members. Since humans like to be emplaced, building the home territory supports a feeling of belonging and helps to create positive bonding. This territory is mirrored by the class seating-plan: three clusters (the clan groups) sit near the windows, in the front, and near the classroom door, respectively (see diagram). With a blanket representing a river and projected images of New Guinean landscapes, the classroom changes into a pristine tropical landscape, complete with a mountain range, river, swamp, waterfall, beach, and ocean.

This is the Land of the Spirits, a no-go area for people

The Tomatua River

2, 5, 7, 8, 17, 21

3, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 22, 23

Mountains
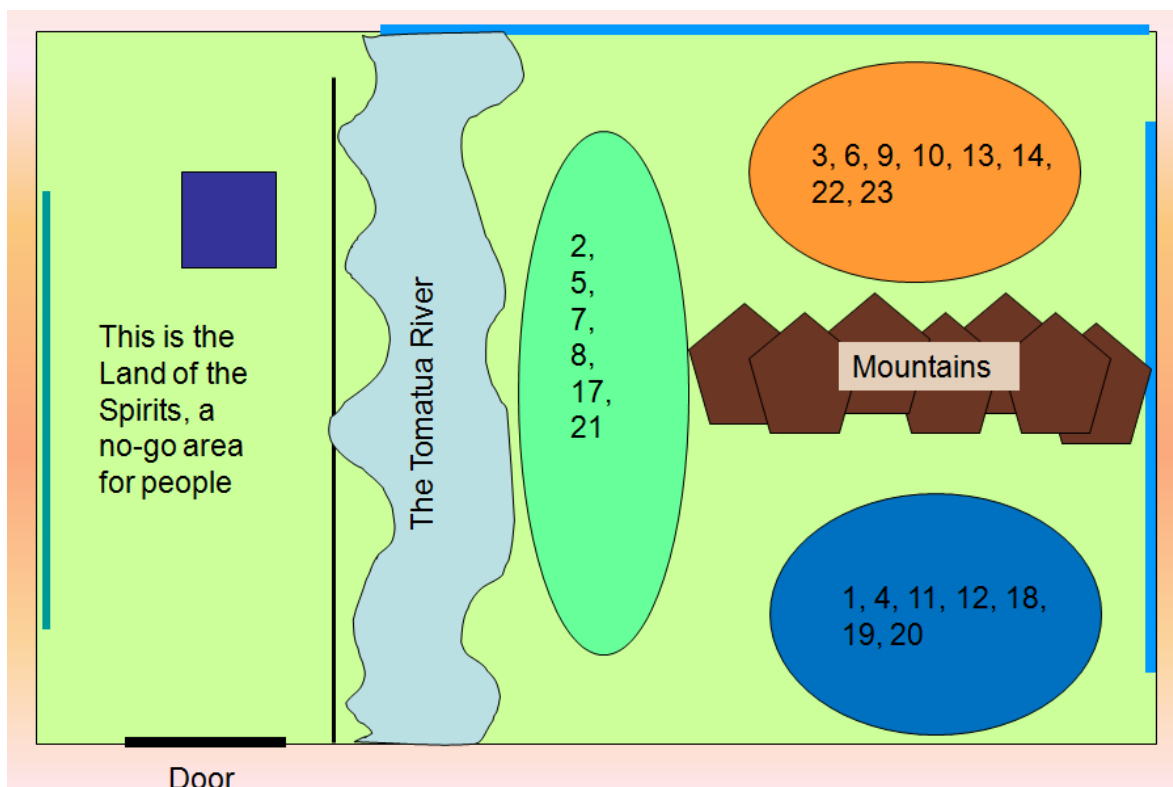
1, 4, 11, 12, 18, 19, 20

Door

Diagram 3: The land of *The Tribe*

So far, each class has succeeded in inhabiting their territory and drawing a map showing where everybody lives and works. The geography of the classroom is pre-set by me in my function as "Goddess" but the clans decide on their village space (river, beach or mountains) by sending out messengers and finding a consensus. A working sheet is distributed to the elders of each clan that helps them to establish and decide upon the nature of their settlement. A lecture on types of houses and forms of dwelling in New Guinea helps the *Tribe* decide on their future roles. In a similar vein, forms of dress and images of landscapes give the clans much to talk about for the remainder of the class. The worksheets are collected at the end of the class and contribute to a clan portfolio which is worth very little (5%) but is useful during *Tribe* time to keep track of all clan setups.

In the following weeks, *Tribe* times are a combination of group work and in-character discussions. I provide the class with a myth of origin that sets some taboos and opportunities by establishing a local history and a basic moral order. On worksheets, students can specify their clan-specific rules, attributes, characteristics, accents, and secrets. Providing a sense of exclusiveness, of competition and of secrecy between the three clan groups seems to stimulate the output of group activities, especially as intermarriage connects clans and anchors all students within the same kinship system. When the clans have articulated their respective attributes and agreed on their forms of secret knowledge, students are asked to live with their spouses in a matrilocal fashion. This requires the husbands to move away from their homelands, where they are typically public speakers and decision-makers, and become respectful, silent in-laws in a residence group where all the women share their clan secrets. Husbands frequently visit their sisters at home and act as messengers and facilitators between the clans.

By acting out their new roles, students learn the difference between clan (descent group) and corporate group (actual neighbours), realize that matrilocal residence is empowering for women and get a sense of the dense network of kinship that connects people in New Guinea and prescribes hierarchies and individual roles. This experience is relevant for a better understanding of face-to-face societies in general and challenges students' perspectives on gender roles and marriage. Significantly, this initiates a learning process that is continued throughout the faculty's Anthropology program. The connection to one's homeland, constructed as the unity of person, land and resident spirits is based on a belief in the unity of substance – a concept that students seem to grasp more easily if they share a "territory." The map below is the result of the 2011 *Tribe*. It includes tree houses, secret/sacred waterfalls, menstrual huts, a sorcerer's hut and men's houses. In discussions in which consensus was the ultimate goal ("all had to be heard"), the clans designated gardening land. Later in the semester, when the work was complete, I pasted all of the drawings into one image.

Diagram 4: The *Tribal* Lands, 2011

Designing a Narrative

Designing games to incite social commitment is a challenge with numerous struggles, opposing agendas, and even unintended and controversial consequences. More specifically, designing narratives to embed the player in moral struggles gives rise to power struggles, controversial issues of intentionality and ethnocentrism, and conflicts around ownership and agency: "When crafting a narrative within a game, one is not designing *an* experience but designing *for* an experience; *an* experience itself can never be designed, but merely the context for experiences with certain likely characteristics may be offered" (Barab et al. 2010:245, orig. emphasis). The narrative of *The Tribe* is built around history, social roles, otherness and interaction, and thus aims to produce a "metaphoric loft" (Bruner 2002:25) when the simulated content resonates with other situations, with other stories and with audiences in other times and spaces (Barab et al. 2010:237).

While the students are working on their map, learning about clan-specific customs and beliefs, listing their daily routines and declaring special skills, the course narrative takes them through the history of New Guinea. Starting with the various waves of early settlers at least 30,000 years ago, lectures and readings follow a chronological order with special focus on colonial times, World War II and modernity. Topics that the course addresses in more ethnographic detail are political systems, kinship, cosmology, conflict, gender, exchange, and art. To exemplify the way *The Tribe* is designed to work in tandem with lectures, readings and presentations, I will briefly describe how we simulate gift exchange in role-play.

Since exchange is so fundamental for human societies and yet very differently constructed in New Guinea than it is in the global economy, it is a crucial topic to address in this class. Readings and lectures on gift-giving create a foundation of knowledge for students. Using *The Tribe* to practice the principles of everyday exchanges, I deliver (as postman) a prefabricated letter containing trivial chatter

by a Canadian mother to her son, number 21, who has eloped and lives in New Guinea. With the letter, the mother includes a useless object (I have used a key ring, a box, and a chain) that all *Tribe* members are told by me ("Goddess") to want and attempt to attain. Students are to get hold of the object by using traditional forms of exchange, and they are to document their success on an attached sheet (folded and packed into a small plastic cover). Students are briefed on strategies to get hold of the object: reasons for demand sharing and ways of hiding the object become relevant to them as they try to win the challenge. This exercise continues to the end of the semester when I reward, with a small shell, those students who have succeeded in obtaining the object. Mostly, students manage to get the object by evoking kinship links, as a counter gift for sex or magic, for "hard work", and for great promises. No case of theft has occurred as of yet, and I don't believe it will, as it would never remain undiscovered in the small world of *The Tribe*. Nonetheless, we saw prolonged concealment as some students did not bring the desired object to class. With the "Letter From Regina", exchange strategies become a useful tool for interaction and students soon realize that reading anthropological texts helps to employ even more useful strategies (like using magic or demanding a compensatory gift). Students see the link between the value of an object and the power of its symbolic meaning, even if the object itself has no use-value.

The exchange of valuable objects with exchange partners who are essentially strangers follows more complex principles than everyday exchanges between relatives. Since the *kula* exchange of shell valuables in south-eastern Papua New Guinea is a staple in undergraduate teaching to illustrate gift exchange, I dedicate a whole class to a practical exercise of such an exchange (Kuehling 2005; Malinowski 1922). The social practices surrounding this complex institution are played out using authentic valuables from my collection. Since the "necklaces" (*bagi*, or *soulava*) are exchanged clockwise and the "armshells" (*mwali*) travel anticlockwise in the Massim region, this exercise depends on the creation of different island communities. In my role as "Goddess", I transform the three clans into three neighbouring Massim islands (Fergusson, Dobu, and Normanby). While this may sound confusing, the students do not seem troubled by their new labels as long as they receive instructions in the colour-code characteristic of their clan. One after the other, the clans meet their *kula* challenge, for example, some travel as a group in an attempt to receive as many *mwali* as possible. The authentic props make this game particularly attractive – and as *kula* entails a display of generous hospitality, the chocolate and candy "food" are clearly appreciated.

Unexpected Visitors
At various times in the semester, I invite visitors (colleagues, students or friends), each of whom acts out the role of an outsider visiting *The Tribe*. These special events are related to the lectures and readings and take place without prior announcement to simulate both the sense of surprise and the feeling of intrusion that most New Guineans would likely experience. While *The Tribe* is internally split into overlapping units of matrilineal clan groups and village residents, each tribe's sense of solidarity grows in these confrontations with outsiders.

By way of example, I will describe one such visit. After a lecture and readings on early colonial history, a "colonial officer on patrol in the deepest bush of New Guinea" storms into the class, rounds up the men (if he manages to identify them) for a head-count and announces road-building duties and taxes. He is rude and gets many details wrong – the students are not amused. They react with "weapons of the weak" that we have discussed in the previous class: two "women" of the 2009 *Tribe* snuck out to avoid being counted. They also got hold of the officer's ball pen, and by using sorcery caused the officer to "feel pain in his shoulder so that he had to cut his visit short". The 2011 *Tribe* actually tried to assault the patrol officer while an entire village went into hiding. Clearly, this short visit (of approximately 15 minutes) demands some debriefing. At the very least, the exercise helps to raise a productive discussion about "civilizing the savages". The body language and facial expressions of students reveal their frustration and opposition, and many students report feelings of intimidation when we discuss the event at the end of the simulation. No *Tribe* wants to be "civilized" by the patronizing

officer – but the experience improves the coherence of the class, as a common enemy tends to strengthen internal solidarity.

The visit by a missionary, in contrast, is experienced in more positive ways as the students are given colourful loincloth and chocolates (these items serve as substitutes for twist tobacco, which was commonly used). Christianity appealed to the islanders because they understood it as a superior form of magic that brought beautiful calico, new food and new ways to achieve power. Although the missionary's visit is also short in comparison to the complementary reading, presentation and class lecture, a number of students typically remember nothing more than the chocolates when asked about the strategies of Christianization in the final exam. The sensual experience of food seems to help at least the weaker students' memories.

Depending on the number of colleagues that I manage to recruit for guest performances, "anthropologists" of different times, who embrace various research styles visit and each studies one of the clans, asking many questions and never returning to discuss their findings. I am still trying to find a "journalist" willing to write an article about *The Savage Tribe* as I believe that this would enhance students' critical reading skills of National Geographic and other media productions. If I find enough ex-*Tribe* members, a noisy tourist group bursts into the room, takes photographs, showers the students with chocolate money and attempts to buy their decorations, crafts, and even bodies. I was told that one of the 2008 clans actually sold the "grumpy old lady with the infidelity issues" (no. 13) to a tourist who looked for a house maid! At the very least, if no group can be mobilized, a lonely backpacker will come and ask for directions to the waterfall (which is secret/sacred), waving a map and some cash. Young men may be willing to guide the tourist to the place but the old lady will certainly not allow it. Recently, a student who once played the senior woman told me how upset she was: "funny, as if there was a real waterfall...".

Late in the semester, when the roles are well established and we begin to talk about global forces, I interrupt the class as a representative of an international mining company. New Guinea, as the class had learned in a lecture, presentation, and various readings and posted information material, is incredibly rich in minerals. Equipped with a phony but complex-looking expertise and contract form, I approach the *Tribe*, trying to convince the elders to sign a contract that would allow for gold mining in their sacred river area. The clans have to figure out the right person to speak with me (in terms of age, status, and gender) and sustain a discussion in which I am tempting them with all the benefits of a gold mine. Some students will side with me, noting such things as, "oh yes, I want money for my tea and sugar!", but others give their *veto* due to environmental and social concerns. The discussion is further enriched with three short texts (one for each village): an advertising pamphlet of a Canadian mining company (Falconbridge), a statement from an anti-mining NGO (Mineral Policy Institute), and readers' comments from a Papua New Guinean daily newspaper (The National). Each group shares the content of their text within the group and then sends an in-law to their clan to inform them. So far, all *Tribes* have decided not to sign the contract, fearing the social costs of mining and the limited benefits in the light of environmental destruction.

In this respect they are more cautious than their real New Guinean counterparts. To accommodate the unexpected events initiated by either the students or myself requires a flexibility which to some students is confusing. As one student noted, "Very interesting class. Like the tribe part… it started out good but became quite disorganized and we got behind towards the end of semester" (Evaluation Winter 2009/10). Since I have now included more remarks on the tentative character of our schedule in my initial lecture and syllabus, those few students who dislike potential shifts and twists of this particular class and prefer a lecture-based learning style and a clear list of learnable facts have the chance to choose another course.

"A Fun Way of Learning" - Simulation Games in Undergraduate Classrooms

In the course, student engagement has benefitted from the simulation game in three respects:

1. The students participate enthusiastically as they are inventing and experiencing parts of the narrative, learning-by-doing about hierarchies, reflecting on their own prejudices, experiencing the relativity of cultural values and experimenting with new gender roles.
2. They reflect better on the salient aspects of New Guinean ethnography, history, cultural identities, and cosmologies and study the readings more thoroughly than they otherwise might as these provide more keys to their personal roles, like clues, strategies, warnings and other information that can potentially be useful for *Tribe* challenges and interactions.
3. The classroom atmosphere is relaxed and open so that students engage in discussion much more readily than they typically do in other classes. In one instance, one student's spontaneous attempt to have the class enact an origin myth was a great success and evidence of the safety of the environment. Not many of my students in other classes would usually agree to play a dog, a pig, or a cassowary bird in an improvised manner.

As members of *The Tribe*, students can feel like owners of their knowledge as they are at once authors, performers and audiences. As author, the student has the opportunity to script the action; as performer, he/she must deal with the consequences of this script as well as unforeseen developments; and as audience, he/she observes and reflects upon the unfolding action. This synergy, according to recent studies on educative computer-based simulation games, "yields a dynamic set of positioning with the potential to simultaneously establish a narrative and convey a lesson, all in a manner that grants the player involvement, ownership, and responsibility" (Barab et al. 2010:261).

As a teaching tool for kinship analysis, *The Tribe* provides the physical clues of understanding terms and categories that normally appear as dry, confusing and unattractive to students. *The Tribe* simulates the difficulties of research in a foreign place, as well as the possibilities of asking the wrong questions, of giving incomprehensible explanations, of dominating each other and of avoiding being dominated. When visiting strangers demand to know the students' names, for example, they receive a number and get confused by the gender blind setup. In short, many areas of trouble in cross-cultural communication are touched on during *Tribe* time and I am hopeful that having felt intimidated by the state, belittled by the church, tempted by big corporate companies, objectified by tourists, and finally having discussed all of these experiences in class may improve future cross-cultural encounters.

It is inevitable that students experience moments of discomfort during the role game, especially when being visited by outsiders. The colonial officer certainly creates a very uncomfortable situation and tourists have caused some grief and anger. Such awkward moments are believed to support an embodied learning process (Greenfield 2006) in which personal memory is tied to course content. In my vision of *The Tribe*, emotional experiences are important and range widely. Awkwardness and anger are addressed in debriefing talks to help the students connect these feelings to the relevant course context (e.g. intimidation with colonialism). Since I make sure to provide ample space for positive experiences such as sharing food, inventing a village world or painting fellow tribe members' faces, the awkward moments tend to stand out as unusual events in students' recollections of a predominantly "fun" class. As one student noted, "I really enjoyed the tribe activity/how the course had a little bit of everything. Also liked that we were asked what we preferred." Another student remarked, "I thought there was a good balance of graded material. I really enjoyed the tribe activity; it helped me have fun while learning".

Conclusions

Simulation games like *The Tribe* can reach students so effectively, I believe, because they take advantage of what could be seen as shared human preferences: to live in groups, often with clearly structured hierarchies, to create personal connections by sharing secrets and food, and to experience 'internal' social bonding through a common outside foe. My students' feedback indicate that they value the *The Tribe's* insights into community-building. It is important to me to set up an egalitarian, gender-balanced *Tribe* to provide students with liberating concepts, but if *The Tribe* was adapted to a different ethnographic area it might take advantage of other forms of power (and gender) relations, and use different prompts and emblems to build both distinctions and competitive elements between subgroups.

The benefits of role-play as an exercise in problem-solving and decision-making have long been acknowledged (Cruickshank and Telfer 1980:78). While these role-playing activities have the disadvantage of taking up a lot of class time, it is time well spent because of the unique development of a positive classroom dynamic. In my experience teaching this course, I, like Cruickshank and Telfer, have observed "cross racial friendship patterns, increased group cohesiveness, improved pupil attitudes toward school, and higher pupil perception of the probability of success" (Cruickshank and Telfer 1980:78). The simulation provides for students a personal context in which concepts are experienced and understood, because the memory of the experience created by the simulation provides a distinct way to recall learned concepts, or an "alternative way of grasping" (Williams 1993:332). Students seem to memorize experiences and facts better through sharing with family and friends, perhaps because they make active use of it outside of the classroom.

The success and popularity of the *Tribe* suggest that simulations should be used more often to complement (but not replace) lectures, readings, presentations, discussions, essays, exams and other methods of teaching and learning. Simulations add a dimension of embodied experience, or sensuous learning, to classic pedagogical methods. Physically using space, sharing it with others within a frame of rules and, as an example, culinary sensations of New Guinean cuisine (such as steamed taro root in coconut cream) or candy (simulating pigs and cooked meals) add to feelings of belonging, responsibility, and security. A lot can happen during *Tribe* time and students are always invited to suggest additions to the narrative. While simulation is "safe, enjoyable, fun" (Cruickshank and Telfer 1980:77), the *Tribe* itself may indulge in unsafe practices at times: I saw a father and a son trying to kill the colonial officer, a young man misleading the tourist who attempted to bathe in the sacred waterfall, a member attempt to influence, through sorcery, an anthropologist.

It may be hard to match New Guinea's "unexpected" opportunities in a simulation, but I am convinced it can be done. As well as the benefit to the students, the enjoyment of the teacher, and the entertainment of everyone involved - such as the actors who visit the *Tribe*, the students' families and friends who hear stories -these activities also hopefully inspire the colleagues who teach next door, overhearing the occasional honking of the conch shell trumpet, the sound of a mourning dirge, and sniffing the sweet scent of cooked food.

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[i] A version of this article was presented at the annual conference of the Canadian Anthropology Association,
[ii] ANTH 248 (The Ethnography of New Guinea) is a 3 credit-hour course that is taught in 13 weeks, twice a week. A single weekly meeting would be preferable for the use of simulation games, but the existing format of 2 classes of 80 minutes is also manageable. Shorter teaching units certainly present a particular challenge for pedagogies beyond the straight lecture.
[iii] This has also been observed in other teaching contexts, e.g. Australian school children (Cruickshank and Telfer 1980:79).
[iv] Some members of *The Tribe* are adopted (1, 3, 5, 9, 10, 15, 21). 9 and 10 are "brothers" and can come up with their story of how they became clan members. 21 is a beachcomber, originally from Regina. The father of 28 is non-existent and 27 is encouraged to make up her own story. 19 is a bit strange, unmarried in spite of being adult. The other roles are less specifically defined.
[v] I very rarely assign a role, for example when a student needs special accommodations or will be often absent for acceptable reasons.
[vi] I have mostly worked with *Tribes* of around 25 students. The diagram can be cropped to match the class size by taking out the junior members who may have "moved to town for work/education". I am currently experimenting with larger groups, following Michael Wesch (e.g. 2008) whose large computer-based simulation games of world history are very successful.