

Chapter Seven — Turf Instincts Create Issues That Trigger

Conflict

Very few instincts have more impact on our intergroup behaviors than our turf instincts. We have layers of very powerful instincts that relate to territory and to turf and those instincts can impact our lives in significant ways when they are activated.

Our cultures spend significant energy on issues of turf — defining turf for each of us in each setting and giving us the rule sets and expected behaviors that both protect and delineate our group and individual turf.

We each know what piece of turf is legitimately ours, and we each know what turf is the rightful turf of our group.

When someone trespasses on our personal turf or invades or threatens our national or group turf, we have strong reactions that have very clear turf instincts at their core.

We feel very right in both defining our turf and protecting our turf when it is threatened.

We Are Not Alone In Having Turf Instincts

We clearly are not alone in having those kinds of instincts. Multiple other species also define turf, protect turf, and make life decisions that are directly influenced by their turf related instincts.

Even some insect species have turf. Some species of ants have very clearly defined turf and some colonies of ants will go to war and die to protect their colonies' turf.

The various primates who live in groups all tend to have some level of group turf.

A number of predator animals have their defined hunting turf. Those hunting animals define and mark the boundaries of their turf with urine and other chemical deposits and they tend to attack other members of their species as well as predators from any other species who try to hunt on their turf.

We Have Group Turf, Family Turf, National Turf, and Individual Turf

We humans define group turf, family turf, community turf, national turf, and individual turf and we each tend to know exactly what turf claims are relevant to each of those categories of ownership for turf.

We are each protective of our own homes and our family turf — often at a very intense level.

It feels right to each of us at a very instinct-sculpted level to have our turf and to protect our turf.

We have written multiple sets of laws about turf in settings across the planet that often contain very high levels of specificity and complexity about turf issues. Our law enforcement mechanisms and our cultural rule sets and behavioral expectations that support our turf instincts all reinforce the turf rights and the turf ownership functionality that we create for people in every setting.

We “Feel Right” Defending Turf

We “feel right” at a very basic level when we are defending our turf. We feel stress and we feel anger at a very basic and innate level when our turf is jeopardized or threatened. We are even angrier when our turf is actually invaded.

When we identify a physical site as being our turf, we tend to take steps at multiple levels to protect that site. It seems very right and it also feels very right to take whatever steps we need to take to protect our turf.

The intertribal wars that happen in so many settings that were discussed earlier in this book as part of our us/them instinct package are

exacerbated, amplified, focused, and often hugely extended for very long periods of time when significant turf issues are clearly and directly involved in any of those tribal conflicts.

When two sets of people in any setting each believe that they each have a pure, clear, direct, and innate group ownership position relative to the same piece of turf, then the tribal paradigm that exists in those settings for each tribe tends to be that the particular and specific piece of turf belongs in a very primal, basic, and inherent way to their own tribe. People believe that their tribal turf is being invaded, stolen, or wrongfully trespassed on by the other tribe if the other tribe is actually in possession of any part of their turf.

Those feelings by each affected group function at a very primal instinctive level and they drive thought processes, emotions, and belief systems for each of the parties affected by those turf related situations in powerful and predictable ways.

Each Tribe Believes In Their Inherent Rights To The Land

Those situations where two groups feel they each have innate and inherent rightful tribal ownership for the same piece of turf create a potent and volatile prescription for major intergroup conflict.

When that specific turf-linked contested ownership situation exists in any setting, then the level of intergroup anger and the intergroup hatred that is created by that set of circumstances can be massive and very primal.

That particular intergroup anger and those kinds kind of turf-linked intergroup conflicts between those sets of people about that piece of contested turf can last forever — for as long as both sets of people feel they have ownership rights at a perceptual and instinctive level to that particular disputed piece of turf.

Those issues trigger very deep instinctive reactions for individuals and for groups of people. The anger levels that exist can be extremely intense in those intergroup contested turf situations.

The anger levels that exist are intense because the instincts we have to defend our turf and the intergroup-based instincts we have to resist being damaged by “them” both trigger anger as part of our response package to each instinct package.

Any time we have our “Them” instincts activated relative to another group of people, we tend to suspend conscience and feel no ethical constraints in our behaviors. We can lose entirely any sense of common humanity and we can find ourselves feeling very right doing damaging and even evil things to “Them.”

Turf instincts and tribally activated us/them instincts can combine in very powerful ways to create very damaging behaviors.

Our group and individual survival instincts can also be triggered fairly directly by some of those turf ownership conflicts, as can our instinctive needs to protect our family and our instinctive needs to protect our offspring from any negative situations and consequences.

Intense anger on those full sets of turf related issues feels very right to the people involved in those settings because that anger is so directly instinct based at multiple very direct and very powerful levels.

Resolution Of Disputed Turf Issues Is Extremely Difficult

Reaching resolution of those specific intergroup turf issues in any setting is incredibly difficult. It is extremely difficult because the sheer logistical challenges that can result from a clear-cut dual sense of contested turf ownership with exactly the same piece of turf being claimed at an instinctive level by more than one tribe can feel both irreconcilably absolute and functionally and operationally insurmountable.

The issues between the groups in those settings feel to each side as though they are absolutely right/wrong issues — very pure and very clear “good versus evil” issues — with each group believing there is only one

right side and each group believing that there is one very clearly wrong and evil side for the people involved and for the relevant turf in that setting.

A major functional problem, obviously, is that each group sees a completely opposite and uncontested “right” side and each group in the setting sees a very different and deeply evil wrong side.

A major functional problem relative to those disputes is that we can’t make more turf. Turf is a finite resource — and we can’t simply resolve intergroup turf issues by creating more turf.

Situational Control Is Inherently Unstable

Any group who loses situational control of the turf in those contested settings generally aspires with great conviction to regain their control — and that aspiration creates an inherent instability for the setting even when the situation seems to be temporarily resolved by possession realities that favor one side or the other.

Those situations cannot be solved or resolved until all parties in each contested setting recognize the specific sets of instincts that are being triggered in each group by the situation and then take very intentional steps together to resolve those instinctive issues in ways that cause people on both sides to feel that their instinctive needs have been met by the solution package that is developed for the situation and for the setting.

Those issues can only be resolved if each side recognizes both their own claim to the turf and the legitimacy of the other group's claim to the turf, and then negotiates in good faith to create valid and achievable win/win outcomes for each group in the setting.

Creating win/win outcomes for any intergroup turf conflict can be particularly hard to do if either side — or if both sides — actually have other reasons to want the conflict to continue.

The Art of Intergroup Peace book discusses those issues and relevant approaches for those settings and situations in more detail.

Multiple Tribal Turf Displacements Happened in Our Country

In our own country, we don't have any settings where we have direct intergroup turf conflicts today, but we did go through a series of very clear and very intentional turf displacements for various groups of people at multiple levels early in our history.

When the tribes of Europe crossed the Atlantic Ocean and invaded the American continents, the invaders displaced the original American tribes from their turf. Each of the original tribes had their tribal turf and each of those tribes were displaced from that turf by the invaders.

The very intentional and deliberate displacements of those original tribes moved many groups of people into exile from turf that had been their ancestral tribal lands for centuries or longer.

The original tribes on both American continents all had each actually had their own pre-invasion levels of tribe-based intergroup conflict. The original tribes all had histories of geographic migration, tribal turf invasion, and long-standing intergroup conflict.

Tribes tend to be tribes wherever they exist.

Before the Europeans invaded, both American continents were full of tribes of people who each tended to have their own intertribal fights, intertribal feuds, and long-standing intergroup wars — with turf instincts activated at a tribal level in multiple settings. The tribes all had their own historic and long-standing tribal enemies and each tribe had its own turf that it defended against enemy tribes.

The Apache and the Navajo did not live in Peace. Nor did the Ojibwa and the Sioux. The Blackfeet and The Cherokee each had their own tribal war heroes and a sense of conflicted with the tribes that occupied adjacent turf.

The Aztecs and Incas both conquered, enslaved, and ethnically cleansed and destroyed a number of other tribal groups that had the

misfortune to be in close proximity to those particular large and more powerful tribes.

The us/them instincts that were triggered by and in the Aztec sacrificial temples functioned at very primal and very obvious instinctive intergroup interaction levels.

Both American continents were full of tribes, and both continents were full of tribal turf issues.

Each Tribe Had Its Ancestral Turf

Each of the tribes that were here when the European invasion occurred had — prior to the time of that Invasion — their own clearly defined tribal turf. Each tribe tended to identify with their tribal turf and each tribe defended that turf in various ways against the other local tribes.

For North America, at least, the tribal turf wars at that particular point in history tended to be very local in scope. Turf issues in North America typically involved border skirmishes between groups of people who considered themselves ancestral enemies, but did not function as mortal enemies with genocidal ambitions.

Full-scale invasions by tribes into other tribal areas in North America were rare. Raids were relatively common. Skirmishes happened in many settings. In some areas, the bloodshed was frequent and the animosities were

constant — and in other areas, actual bloody conflict between local groups was relatively rare at that point in history.

The history chapter of the *Cusp of Chaos* book describes those issues, those situations, and that history in more detail.

The invasion of the American continents by the new set of very warlike and well-armed tribes from Europe significantly changed that pre-invasion intergroup history. The various invasions of American turf by people from Europe who were seeking land to colonize ended up with massive turf displacements for the original American tribes.

Columbus “Discovered The Land For Mankind”

Us/Them instincts at a very primal and basic level were clearly fully activated in the minds of the invaders. The large statue of Christopher Columbus that stands today in Washington, D.C. — very near the Capital Building — actually celebrates and honors Columbus for “Discovering These New Lands for Mankind.”

That exact wording from the inscription on that statue of Columbus that stands in our national capital today makes the point clearly that the Us/Them thinking and Us/Them paradigms were so extreme for the invaders from Europe that the millions of people who were the original inhabitants of this continent literally were not considered to be “Mankind.”

Most of the original North American tribes ultimately ended up being moved to geographically defined reservations that each became the new physical location and the designated turf for each tribe.

Tribal turf issues created by that displacement process still exist. Disputes about ownership and legacy claims about that original turf continue to create some levels of turf conflict in our country. But that conflict is not at a level that approaches the tribal turf conflict issues that we see today in the Middle East, Sri Lanka, Syria, Gaza, or any of the other sites where blood is being shed with some regularity to protect turf, to continue to occupy turf or to invade and dominate another group's turf.

In those settings in those countries, turf issues create huge levels of anger and intergroup conflict today. Those intergroup turf issues are often the most important issues in many peoples' lives in a number of settings today.

Our Cities Tend To Have Clear Areas Of Group

Concentration

In our country, at this point in time, those original sets of intergroup turf issues that relate to the Native American tribal land have become more historical factors than active and functional triggers for current intergroup conflict.

As our cities become more diverse, however, and as the growing ethnic populations in many of our cities end up being divided to a significant degree in each of those locations by race and ethnicity — we are potentially moving to a situation where something that functions very much like a new generation of tribal turf alignment and group linked turf conflicts might become both very real and dangerously relevant for America.

Our cities are becoming ethnically concentrated.

We are forming very large areas of very high levels of ethnic and racial population density in our major cities. The most recent population distribution maps from the last census that show how concentrated we are becoming are available for review by everyone on the Internet.

We have always had areas of our major cities with high levels of ethnic concentrations. Chinatowns have existed in several cities. Areas like Harlem and Watts have had high levels of African American population concentrations for a very long time.

People Prefer To Live With “Us”

As we become more diverse as a country, instead of having our growing minority populations blended into the larger population and living in proportionate numbers spread evenly through all communities and neighborhoods, we are seeing growing areas of ethnic focus for where

people choose to live. We are not blending. In many areas, we are ethnically concentrating. We are now creating major areas of racial and ethnic population concentration in our major cities and that trend is likely to accelerate.

The census maps that show our current population ethnicity concentrations by neighborhood level show that most of our major cities are now basically fairly clearly divided into a number of ethnic and racial enclaves — with major areas and highly focused neighborhoods in each city where a given ethnic or racial group makes up two-thirds or more of the population.

Harlem and Watts now have their equivalent ethnic population concentration focus echo in every major city. That level of ethnic and racial concentration is happening in very large part because people who have choices about where to live often choose to live with other people who trigger a sense of “us.”

People very often choose to live in neighborhoods where other people are more likely to be from the same ethnic “us,” cultural “us,” or racial “us” gender-preference “us” or even economic “us.”

Both political issues and economic issues for our cities are directly impacted by those increasingly relevant population concentrations because

there is a clear sense in many of those neighborhoods who is “us” and who is “not us” for those locations.

Street Gangs Are Highly Ethnic

The various street gangs that have increasing power in several of our major cities all tend to be divided entirely along ethnic and racial lines.

There are no known multi-ethnic street gangs. Street gangs have increasing power in many settings.

Those street gangs each tend to identify and fiercely defend their own tribal turf in very primal us/them behavior patterns.

People who are from rival gangs who trespass on another gang’s turf in a number of our cities are too often damaged and sometimes killed.

Even non-gang people from a given neighborhood who venture into another gangs neighborhood can be at risk of being damaged or killed for being trespassers who activate the turf instincts for the local gang.

Hundreds of turf-related gang-linked killings happen in our cities now — and the potential exists for that death rate to climb to much higher numbers.

For the people who run the street gangs that dominate those areas of our cities, it feels very right to damage anyone they perceive to be “Them”

and it feels very right to hurt anyone who they believe to be in violation of their us/them turf instincts.

Gang members personify both us/them instincts and turf-linked group interaction instincts.

Our Prisons Are Disproportionately Filled With Minority Americans

Those same ethnic and racial gang war lines that divide our cities now also divide most of our prisons. Prisons tend to be dominated in many relevant ways by the racial and ethnic gangs that function in each prison setting.

The prison gangs each tend to have their own culture and their own turf. Anyone who doesn't understand that reality and who does not act accordingly when incarcerated in some settings has a high risk of not surviving being imprisoned.

We have more people in prison than any Western country by a factor of four or more. We have seven times more people in prison per capita than Canada. The majority of our prisoners are from our minority groups.

Hispanic Americans are three times more likely to be imprisoned than White Americans. African Americans are nearly six times more likely to be

imprisoned than White Americans. Those demographic realities very directly drive gang composition in our prisons.

Our turf instincts play out in very primal and pure ways in our prison settings.

We will not end our next set of inner city American turf wars with negotiations or with periodic situational local truces. We will need to take a whole set of steps that will be central to achieving intergroup Peace in all settings and we will need to apply those intergroup interaction strategies to those neighborhoods to make them safe for all occupants and inhabitants.

We will need to create a spillover benefit from our basic intergroup Peace in other settings that will give us the functional context we can use to deal more effectively and collectively with what could otherwise end up as very real inner city turf conflicts in too many settings.

We need to have our cities function as an “us” that includes all of the relevant groups in ways that create intergroup trust and shared intergroup benefit.

We need every city to be an “us.”

InterGroup Turf Conflicts Will Require Enlightened Solutions

For the multi-tribal countries with turf conflicts that exist today in other parts of the world, it is clear that for the people in those specific

settings where two tribal groups claim exactly the same piece of turf, we will need a new level of very enlightened negotiation processes to end or defuse those particular turf-linked tribal wars.

The people who are involved in those conflicts on both sides in each setting will need to understand how much of their very basic energy and their relevant emotions about those issues are affected and created directly and explicitly by their instincts.

People on both sides in those settings will need to recognize that the other side has some legitimacy to its instincts and to its beliefs. People on both sides will need to convert from win/lose outcomes — or lose/lose outcomes — to win/win goals and win/win targeted results.

Both sides in those settings need to be committed to win/win solutions to have any hope of resolving those conflicts. Win/lose solutions have no chance of success in those settings.

Lose/lose solutions are highly likely to be the functional consequence of trying to achieve win/lose solutions in those settings.

We need very intentional win/win solutions that are explicitly and very instinctively committed to by all of the major players in each of those settings to give us any chance for intergroup Peace.

We Need Win/Win Solutions To End The Turf Wars Here And

Elsewhere

To resolve those sets of issues in American cities, we need all groups in each city to agree that we need to be an “us” for the city — with all groups doing well in a win/win context where we all want the other groups to do well and prove it by helping all groups succeed.

We need our turf instincts at a key level to be activated by being shared members of community based us — and we need to work together in the context of each community to create safe turf, safe and good schools, and communities that support everyone’s health by creating both active living and healthy eating functional support for all people.

If we take pride in our cities and agree to come together on shared ways to make our communities of our neighborhoods as evidence of our inclusive diversity and not have the neighborhoods trigger their own sense of conflicted turf.

To create Peace in those other settings in the world where two groups claim the same turf, we need win/win solutions that are created by people who understand and who accept that each group in that setting has its own legitimate needs. People in each contested setting will need to accept that sense of legitimacy for the needs of each group.

We Need A Commitment To Win/Win Outcomes For Those

Settings

The people who want to achieve Peace in those conflicted settings all need to agree that those needs should be met for all groups in ways that create safety and success for all of the people in each setting.

Safety needs to be central to those solutions. No group can or will negotiate a Peace — or even agree to a truce — that doesn't clearly and particularly guarantee safety for members of their group.

Survival instincts will clearly be directly relevant to the turf resolution strategies for each of those settings, and any Peace approach that doesn't meet the basic survival instincts needs of a group in those settings will not be able to succeed.

The people in those sites will need negotiations that allow each of the warring groups to recognize both their own instinctive reactions and the equally deeply felt instinctive reactions of the other relevant groups in each setting.

Peace in those settings can only happen if negotiations between credible parties can work out win/win solutions for both the turf ownership issues and for the very legitimate issues of on-going population safety and population prosperity for all relevant groups.

Both *The Art of Intergroup Peace* and *The Cusp of Chaos* — sister books to this book — deal with those issues and discuss the existing situation in those countries in more detail. Those are extremely difficult and volatile turf instinct challenges.

Many Countries Are Now At War With Themselves

We live in a world where the end of colonialism and the collapse of the Soviet Union both created a plethora of multi-ethnic nations whose current external boundaries make little or no functional sense. Turf issues in all of those settings are triggering conflicts.

The purely arbitrary national boundaries that now exist for countries like Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, and Pakistan force warring tribes of people with long-standing intergroup turf autonomy issues to function together in countries that should have no legitimacy or standing as nation states today.

In all of those settings, we need a solution that would break the warring subsets of people into either semi-independent ethnic Cantons — like the ones that are used in Switzerland — or into purely independent separate nations — like the six countries that resulted from the collapse of Yugoslavia.

We need the United Nations to create processes that would allow those kinds of new nation states to emerge from those multi-tribal countries

in Peaceful ways that would protect the safety of minority peoples in each newly autonomous setting.

The Art of Intergroup Peace explains some of those possibilities and strategies.

Warring tribes in all of those countries continue to hate and damage the other tribes in each of those settings. When the tribes are not at war, they function in an artificial non-combat setting where each tribe has its clear allegiance to its own tribal turf and would like to have autonomous control over their ancestral territory.

It would be nicely aligned with our basic turf instincts to allow that to happen.

The reason that those kinds of separation approaches that would give each tribe control over its own turf is not allowed to happen is that the most powerful nation states that control international law are all, themselves, multi-tribal at some level and the Alpha leaders of those countries have no intention of ever allowing their own internal separatist groups to separate.

There is a very clear conspiracy among the leaders of the countries who control international law and who continue to insist on maintaining the current boundaries of all of the nonsensical nations that is aimed at preventing those separatist groups from succeeding.

Those issues are referred to in disparaging terms as “sectarian,” with the implication that being sectarian is a bad thing to be.

A world that was not dominated by the Alpha-instinct turf control needs of major countries would facilitate helping those tribal entities to achieve autonomy rather than calling the separatists terrorists and causing their efforts to fail.

We Also Need To Create Turf Safety

Our own turf issues in this country are very relevant and real, but they are much less inflammatory than the turf issues that exist in many of those other countries.

For the U.S. — and for now — we all need to recognize that our turf instincts do exist. We need to deal with the racial and ethnic geographic concentration issues in our cities and communities that are turf-linked and we need to deal with the consequences of those factors openly and directly.

Overall, to make all areas of all communities safe, we will need to expand our own sense of “our” turf in each setting to make all of this country the legitimate turf of the new American “Us.”

We need to agree that our goal is to be inclusive in all settings — and we need to agree that voluntary self-segregation decisions relative to issues like where people live can be acceptable as long as there are no exclusionary

rules or practices that keep anyone from safely living anywhere that people here might want and choose to live.

We all need to be able to live in any neighborhood and we all need to safely be in any neighborhood.

When we recognize that our country is the relevant turf for all Americans, then our turf issues can unite us instead of dividing us.

Chapter Nine of this book deals with those issues.

Our turf instincts shape our behaviors and our thought processes at levels that we often do not understand or even detect. When we understand those issues, we can make group and individual choices that help each of us and all of us live in safety and Peace.

That clearly should be our goal.