Landon Smith

C Block; Batiste

4/23/15

?

One can take many things from Achebe’s book, *Things Fall Apart,* but perhaps the most important is a lesson that the Umoufians learn the hard way. A society that idolizes physical strength and aggression is doomed to fail. As the Ibo society falls apart, the reason for their desolation come crashing down as well: the idolization of violence and brawn above all else.

The Ibo society is built around the belief that those who show individual power and hostility make the best leaders. The “warlike clan” (Achebe 171) as a whole is infatuated with violence and who ever excels at this trait is treated with respect. Okonkwo, one of the most respected men in Umoufia, strives to reach these idolized goals. Originally the son of an impoverished farmer, Okonkwo has worked his way to the top simply through acts of strength and aggression such as wrestling and warfare. In keeping with his high place in society, “Okonkwo never show[es] any emotion outwardly, unless it be the emotion of anger.” (28) To do such, he, “rul[es] his house hold with a heavy hand,” such that even his wives and children, “liv[e] in perpetual fear….” (13) The negative effect of Okonwo’s quest for power is again increased when Okonkwo plays a part in the killing of Ikemefuna, a captive of the Umoufians who has grown close with Okonkwo and views him as a father. Despite their bond, when the tribe decides that Ikemefuna should die, Okonkwo, “dr[aws] his machete and cut[s] him down… afraid of being thought weak.” (61) The lengths to which Okonkwo is willing to go just to satisfy his tribe’s bloodlust, show Umoufia’s unhealthy focus on physical strength and violence.

The missionaries who come to Umoufia look down upon the violence that the natives practice. Instead, they preach peace and acceptance of all. The preachers all believe that aggression is not the answer and try to enforce that belief on the locals. Mr. Brown ,one of these preachers is descried as, “very firm in restraining his flock from provoking the wrath of the clan.” (178) Later, when deciding how to defend from the violent Umoufians, Mr. Smith, a colleague of Mr. Brown says, “One thing is clear, we cannot offer physical resistance to them. Our strength lies in the Lord” (188) Quickly, these teachings pay off. The osu who have been hostilely oppressed by the clan, search for shelter in the Church, “seeing that the new religion welcomed twins and such abominations….” (155) Mr. Brown sums up the difference between their cultures in one of his visits to a village elder. He says of Chukwu, the supreme Ibo god, “You are afraid of Chukwu. In my religion Chuckwu is a loving Father and does not need to be fared by those who do his will.” (181) In Umoufia the culture is focused around fear of your superiors. This is mainly because to get there your elders have had to been violent and strong. The highest power, Chukwu, hold the admiration and fear of everyone, as he is the highest power. However, the missionaries believe that living under fear is not the right way to live. They preach a religion in which the superiors look down on their flock with love.

Eventually, these two societies come into true conflict. The missionaries end up dominating Umoufia in the end because of the violent actions of the clans. It all starts to fall apart with massacre in Abame. In this town, the villagers decided to kill the foreigners without allowing them to talk. This aggression marked the doom of their town as the white men attacked the market weeks later. In the end, “everybody was killed.” (139) Their instigation does not put the people of Abame at fault, only their society. Although Uchendu knows the old proverb, “there is nothing to fear from someone who shouts” (140), his cultures focus on aggression and refuses to follow that saying. Few of the Umoufians understand that killing with out reason is what drives the missionaries to a response. Although it their culture may be failing anyway, they are only ensuring their own death with unprovoked aggression. Okonkwo makes the same mistake as the men of Abame, by killing the messenger before he has a chance to speak his mind. That is how he ends up, buried like a dog, in a paragraph of the book, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.