Differences Tied up by Aspirations

America is a land of diversity with striking snapshots of different cultures and heritages. The country provides a stage where distinct nations and nationalities coexist with integrity, and establishes a place where the newcomers can call home. This notion of creating a vibrant and heterogeneous population gave birth to the city of Clarkston, Georgia where refugees from different parts of the world including Sudan, Iraq and other war-torn countries settled.

Notwithstanding the unique cultural rituals, social backgrounds and languages spread among the refugees, their children’s passion for soccer brought them altogether. This strong desire caught Luma’s attention—a woman from Jordan who grew up playing soccer herself. Thus, she made up her mind to coach the boys with an interest in soccer and move their ambitions from a parking lot to a safer field, her own free will. Her dedication and hard work was recognized after Warren St. John explored it in his book Outcasts United along with the different aspects of Clarkston, the lives of the refugees and the soccer team known as the Fugees. The teams were divided into three groups based on age. Among them were the Under 15s Fugees and the Under 13s Fugees that shared similar characteristics and at the same time had features that set them apart. The Under 15s Fugees and the Under 13s Fugees were composed of boys who were psychologically hurt, and were able to maintain a strong relationship with their coach, Luma, albeit the boys from both teams behaved differently.

The first similarity between the Under 13s and the Under 15s Fugees was the teams consisted of boys who were victims of the ongoing civil unrest in their countries. For decades,
The mass killing of people in different spheres of the world gave rise to children with vivid memories of violence and brutal actions including, but not limited to, parents getting shot and villages burning down into ashes. At the beginning, Luma refrained from asking her players about their pasts because she did not want to disturb their emotional well-being by bringing up their miseries. Therefore, she tried her best to make the soccer field a place free of circumstances that summoned up memories. In some instances, a selected number of boys from the team “...would reveal specifics about their experiences in ways that underscored the lingering effects of those traumas” (St. John 58). For instance, one time, Jeremiah, one of the players for the Under 13s Fugees, told Luma he witnessed his father getting killed, and she did not know how to react. In the same manner, the boys from the Under 15s Fugees, who fled from countries that had a long history of war, saw insecurity, conflict and delinquency their whole lives. “Their social skills, such as they were, had developed in a crucible of fear and stress,” (120) St. John added. Since they grew up in environments filled with terror, they perceived the world as a potential threat to their existence. In essence, the wars in different parts of the world caused inevitable damage to the boys from the Under 15s and the Under 13s Fugees which Luma quickly became accustomed to.

The strong association they had with their coach, Luma, was another commonality the Under 13s and the Under 15s Fugees shared. Almost all the refugees found it demanding to strike a balance between working and looking after their kids; therefore, they had to trust Luma and the Fugees with their children. In fact, she had no prior experience of dealing with immigrants, yet she gladly accepted the responsibility and started to actively get involved in their lives. Once, she took Jeremiah to go shopping where he asked her to buy him bacon. She told him that, as a Muslim, she did not eat pork, and she suggested that they purchase turkey bacon
instead. A few weeks later, he told his mother, “You can’t eat that,” as she reached for a package of bacon, “Coach says it’s not good” (St. John 79). This incident embodied the broad spectrum of the fact that her association with the Under 13s Fugees was not limited to teaching them the basics of soccer, but it stretched deep into their lives. By the same token, the Under 15s had a tight bond with their coach, Luma. They wanted nothing more than a family figure that was capable of showing them support and care. Thus, they counted on her generosity in case of trouble. For example, Luma, once, took Fornatee, one of the players from the Under 15s Fugees, to the nearest CVS in order to provide him with first aid supplies after he was injured in one of the games. “She is more than a coach to me - she cares about you like she’s your parent,” (St. John 112) said Fornatee as he described what that trip to the drug store meant to him. Therefore, Luma’s role as a mother and a coach in the lives of the boys from the Under 13s and the Under 15s was stronger than one would expect.

On the contrary, the boys from the Under 13s and the Under 15s Fugees were not equally respectful of the regulations and their fellow players. Luma, indeed, was not lenient when it came to dealing with the boys. Failure to comply with her rules, with no doubt, resulted in expulsion. The boys from the Under 13s joined the Fugees from the first season, and because of this they seemed to understand what it took to stay in the team, and they made her expectations part of their day-to-day lives. They obeyed the commands without questioning them. St. John described them as “…the most malleable and the most responsive to Luma’s strict principle” (103). They were on time during practice, they attended the entire tutoring program, a program designed to assist them with their assignments, and played with enthusiasm. On the other hand, the Under 15s team was the total opposite. As a matter of fact, Luma would expect the boys from the Under 15s who were in their youth to set a good example for the younger ones; however, that
was never the case. They did not even know what was best for themselves, let alone for the other younger players. St John considered this immature behavior merely as natural and unavoidable. “They were in the throes of adolescence, their moods subject to the disorienting flood of hormones that can turn even the most well-adjusted kids into moody rebels,” he added to further his reasoning (105). They were mostly opposed to Luma's requirements and had their own ways of dealing with the rules. This became clearly visible after the news about the hair rule, a stricture against long and improperly groomed hair, was sent around. They talked amongst themselves wondering how hairstyle interfered with playing soccer because voicing their displeasure assuredly was not going to alter her stance. As a result, some chose not to play in the team while a number of others stayed. In brief, the Under 15s vis-à-vis the Under 13s were disobedient and presented the most challenge to Luma's authority.

In general, the Under 13s and the Under 15s Fugees identified with boys who were victims of the ongoing civil unrest in their countries; therefore, it was amazing how they were able to endure such a pain. Noting the boys' experiences, Luma developed a compelling desire, besides being their coach, to extend her connection beyond the soccer field and get involved in their lives. She also introduced them to distinct societal and cultural norms. In fact, dealing with emotionally damaged children was not her area of expertise; nonetheless, she did everything in her power to create energetic, well-adjusted and responsible generations. Despite all the arduous tasks of coaching the boys, Luma also had to deal with some unevenness likely to be present among the teams. The Under 15s, for instance, in contrast to the Under 13s, had difficulty abiding by her rules. Above all this, they stood by each other’s side enjoying the new things the country had to bring along the way. They negotiated and collaborated in some occasions embracing the beauty of diversity and comfort the United States of America had to offer.
Works Cited