

# The ties that surprise

## Book Review

### "Weeping Under This Same Moon"

By Jana Laiz

Crow Flies Press, 288 pages, \$14

Reviewed by Jody Kordana

Special to the Eagle

"Weeping Under This Same Moon" is a touching young-adult novel by Berkshire author Jana Laiz. Based on true events, it outlines the eventual meeting of two teenage girls as they navigate the social fallout of the end of the Vietnam War. We follow several months of their lives as fate slowly draws them together, and along the way discover the value within their unassuming presences in a turbulent time.

Mei is the eldest daughter of a large Chinese family that is forced out of their home in Vietnam. Her parents choose her to be the first to escape. She takes one younger brother and sister with her and joins the stream so-called "Boat People," beginning a journey they hope will eventually lead their entire family to safety.

Mei's trip aboard the boat and subsequent stay in a Malaysian refugee camp as they await approval to continue to America is colored with descriptions of the abysmal conditions of the jour-

ney. Her observations, both of beauty and despair, feature a delicate nuance of thought that assures us Mei's gentle, loving, artistic nature stay intact through these brutal experiences. She takes her responsibility as the self-sacrificing sole caretaker for her younger siblings with maturity and grace until they move.

Hannah is an unhappy American teen, ostracized at school and misunderstood by her family. But she is not a stereotypically disgruntled and spoiled teen, as we learn she is exceptionally empathetic, and her emotions run deep. Her frustrations stem not from self-pity — instead, surrounded by the aimlessly destructive habits of her peers and inattentive adults, she has no true outlet for her burgeoning environmental and social beliefs.

Hanna experiences an epiphany when she sees a television news story about the Boat People. She feels strongly drawn to the cause, and immediately begins to research possibilities to help Vietnamese refugee assimilation. This takes her to an office at the International Rescue Committee where she finally finds her calling, and we follow her inspiring transformation from confused, frustrated teen to passionate refugee advocate.

Laiz shows impressive adept-



ness in presenting Mei and Hannah with distinctly different voices without taking away from the seriousness of their situations. As an examination of one girl's struggles with the loss of the only life she knew, and another girl's struggles to find a purpose to a life that is secure yet unfocused, the novel serves as a reminder of the smaller points of life that often tie people together. They ironically share certain sufferings that, despite being vastly opposite in origin, result in similar levels of psychological strain.

For example, while Mei experiences excruciating hunger during her journey, Hannah develops an eating disorder. Avoiding presenting Hannah's problems as

ungrateful superficial angst in comparison to refugee hardship and falling into common guilt-laying parental lecturing, which could easily happen, Laiz skillfully opens Hannah's sensitive soul to us.

We truly feel the longing within her to gain some control in her life and make a distinctive difference in the world, and the depth of her low self-esteem that strips her of appetite in an effort to make herself, at least outwardly, more conventionally appealing.

There are numerous other surprising subtleties as we see additional unexpected parallels between Mei's and Hannah's emotional experiences. Whether it is the fear they experience when facing unfamiliar situations or learning to move on from the pangs of first romantic infatuations, these two young women are indeed weeping under the same moon.

Laiz's novel is a standout in its simplicity. Being a true-life young-adult novel set in the seventies, there is a noticeable absence of the juvenile glitz and glamour of teen vampires, youthful wizards, fantastical romantic scenarios and technological distractions. Each interaction, accomplishment and goal is completely within reach of every individual reader regardless of class, race, geography or era.