



Canadian director Atom Egoyan and his wife Arsinée Khanjian attend the Toronto International Film Festival.

By 17, she was performing in Radio-Canada television productions, and later studied theatre in France and Quebec. Her much-performed play, *Les filles du 5-10-15*, explores the generational conflicts between two young girls and their parents, who run a five-and-dime store.

Michelle Hartman, who teaches Arabic literature at McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies, says that the arts frequently feature the theme of people having "a different relationship with a homeland" that they are exiled or separated from. "We tend to read novels or other cultural work

through the lens of identity," she explains, "But a lot of authors are more interested in being read for their artistic value."

May Telmissany is a case in point. The Egyptian-born novelist named her first novel, *Doniazade*, after a character in *The Thousand and One Nights*. "I started it three days after losing my child," she says, finishing the book in three months but later reworking it to add fictional elements. For Telmissany, it's the universal story of a woman coping with the loss of a stillborn child rather than a novel about "an Egyptian woman living in Cairo."

Cultural context is impossible to ignore. Wajdi Mouawad, a Québécois actor, playwright, novelist, stage director and film director, fled the civil war in Lebanon at 16 and settled in Montreal with his parents. Mouawad has written some dozen plays as well as adapting classics by Cervantes, Shakespeare and Chekhov to great acclaim, but is best known for *Littoral*, a comic-tragic tale of a young Montrealer of Lebanese descent who takes his dead father back to the old country for burial.

Lebanon's civil war also forced Nadine Ltaif to abandon home and

friends. "I look back on that time as a wound—a scar," she says. The trauma informed her first book of poems, *Les Métamorphoses d'Ishtar*, which examined social oppression and women's empowerment. For the past decade, Ltaif has worked with Hejer Charf, a filmmaker originally from Tunisia, on projects such as Charf's film *Les Passeurs*, which offers hope for reconciling the needs of different cultures and races. The fact that she is a Christian and Charf is a Muslim, says Ltaif, "makes it doubly significant to work on a film about reconciliation."

Ltaif appeared in a National Film Board documentary in 1992 directed by Michka Saäl, a Jewish woman originally from Tunisia. *A Sleeping Tree Dreams of its Roots* uses super-8 home movies, old photos, dramatizations and casual conversations to explore the varied ancestries of Ltaif and Saäl. "I no longer 'dream of my roots,'" says Ltaif today. "Sitting in a café in Montreal or seeing a squirrel in a tree can inspire me to write." ❁

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IN BRIEF

Passport Canada passes three-million mark

Passport Canada's volume has reached levels never seen before, with more than three million passports issued last year. "More Canadians than ever before recognize that the passport is the best travel document," said Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay.

Passport Canada, a special operating agency of DFAIT, has seen a steady increase in volume over the

past five years. In 2001-2002, some 1.7 million passports were issued and about 27 percent of the population held a valid passport. By 2005-2006, more than three million passports were issued and close to 40 percent of the population had passports. Passport Canada forecasts that by 2008-2009, some 3.8 million passports will be issued and almost half of all Canadians will hold passports.

To meet the demand, Passport Canada has 33 offices across the country, as well as more than 90 Canada Post and Service Canada

receiving agents who help ensure applications are correctly completed. It also offers extended hours during the week and Saturday service in busier offices during the peak winter season.

To avoid congestion and shorten waiting times, Passport Canada recommends that Canadians apply for passports in the spring, summer or fall. They can send their applications by mail, use Service Canada or Canada Post services or fill out their application using "Passport on-line" at www.passportcanada.gc.ca.

