

Le Carré Rouge

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Many articles written about the student protests spoke of *le carré rouge*, the small square of red felt that was the most visible, recognizable symbol of the student protest. There was a time in the summer of 2012 when it seemed like more people in Montreal than not were wearing this symbol.

"*Le carré rouge*" appears in many articles I translated. Sometimes it refers to a universal concept, as in, "*On sait ce que signifie le carré rouge* (We know what the red square signifies)." Sometimes, the same term refers to a specific instance of the symbol, as in, "*C'est pour ça que je porte le carré rouge* (This is why I wear the red square)."

Translated literally, "*le carré rouge*" is "the red square." Yet, as is the case with many literal translations, this simply sounds "false." If someone is wearing a cross around her neck, you don't say that she is wearing "the cross." Nor would you say that a person was wearing "the jersey" of the Montreal Canadiens, unless it was in a museum: "In this display case, we see the jersey the Habs (see glossary) wore in 1966."

English-language journalists hesitated to use the term "the red square." Often, they sidestepped the issue by speaking of them in plural: "Many people in the crowd wore red squares." Sometimes a newspaper would report that a specific person, such as a politician or student leader, wore "his or her red square." Occasionally, they would insert an adjective to soften the translation, as in, "Members of the band performed wearing the symbolic red square."

This is Fucking Class War

As the student conflict wore on and positions became entrenched, the term "*carré rouge*" took on a new meaning, as people riding the metro to Parc Jean Drapeau discovered: "Red Squares," they were told, "shouldn't ask too many questions."

I am an outsider. I was born far from Québec, in a province with different politics. Can I ever be a red square? The students won me over, as they won over many people. And yes, I pinned a red square to my backpack. But is that enough? Can I ever wear the same red square as someone who has lived in Québec her entire life?

I still wear my red square. And I believe that, someday, it will be possible to visit a museum and see "the red square," the small piece of felt that toppled a premier and that symbolized "*l'éveil d'un peuple* (the awakening of a people)." But, as a translator,

Carré rouge

I am reluctant to interpret the same red square on every person who decides to wear this symbol. It is not up to me to speak for them.

I wear a red square, yes. But the day has yet to come that I can say I wear "*le carré rouge*."