

Manifestation

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Translating the word *manifestation* into English inevitably requires making an interpretive decision, as one must choose whether it means «demonstration» or «protest.» It seems telling that the French language sees no need to differentiate between the two; a *manifestation* is a *manifestation*; more generically, a «happening.» However, reading the mainstream English media's understanding of what happened here in the spring and summer of 2012, the gulf between a demonstration and a protest appeared enormous.

During the strike, the government and mainstream media outlets painted the idea of «protest» as violent, disruptive (is it so terrible to occasionally be

disrupted?) and chaotic. The word «demonstration,» on the other hand, seemed like the antithesis of violence; it evoked a dignified and peaceful way of voicing one's beliefs. And despite my profound disagreement with the ways in which those with power had perverted something as democratically healthy as protest to indicate a nefarious activity, I often took the less controversial way out, and translated *manifestation* as «demonstration,» and *manifestant* as «demonstrator.» It seemed like the less judgmental, less loaded term. My struggles with this single word always reminded me not only of the interpretive power of the translator, but also of the ways in which we become so protective about the language of the social movements with which we identify. I felt guilty for playing the game and shying away from such a noble word as «protest.»

What happened in this movement was far more complex, dynamic, creative and all-encompassing than a *manifestation*, a «demonstration» or a «protest.» We even invented new words to convey what we were doing; my English-speaking friends and I talked about going «casseroling» (in French, the equally made up «*casseroler*»), for example, a word with its origins in French but its morphology in English. Our *manifestations* became so routine that we all took to calling them the shortened and colloquial *manifs*. We were generating new vocabulary daily. And we opposed the heavy paternalistic hand of our government and the complicity of those with the loudest voice in our society by doing things that did not look much like protesting or demonstrating at all, but which very much were.