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Mireille Rosello
Northwestern University

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European Hospitality Without a Home

Abstract

How do European governments conceptualize what they call "hospitality" when they draft immigration laws and when they allow the concepts of asylum, of illegal immigrants, to change according to a constantly evolving political context? What consequences...

Keywords

European hospitality, asylum, illegal immigrants, politics, regional identity, ethnic identity, cultural identity, political hospitality, ethical hospitality, commercial hospitality, guest, host, invitation, parasites, hostages, Didier Van Couwelaert, Un aller simple, a One Way Ticket

European Hospitality without a Home:
Gypsy Communities and Illegal Immigration
in Van Cauwelaert's *Un aller simple*

Mireille Rosello
Northwestern University

How do European governments conceptualize what they call “hospitality” when they draft immigration laws and when they allow the concepts of asylum, of illegal immigrants, to change according to a constantly evolving political context? What consequences does the official discourse on immigration have on the private practices of individuals who live within states, or within local communities defined by their regional, cultural, or ethnic identities? At historical junctions when frontiers and nations are re-defined, do the “laws” of hospitality change? And does the slow creation of what some critics have called a new European “fortress” (McClintock 13) lead to radical definitions of the very concept of hospitality?

In this article, I propose to examine those questions from two different perspectives: the first part concentrates on the historical context that anchors my reflection into the present situation and asks about the theoretical issues raised by the need to define different types of hospitality (political, ethical, and commercial hospitality). In a second part, I look at the contradictions generated by the impossibility of choosing one single type of hospitality. Because such frictions are beginning to be inscribed in literary texts and testimonies, I focus on one recent novel that attempts to reconsider the definitions of the guest, of the host, of

invitations, of parasites, and of hostages: Didier Van Cauwelaert's 1994 Goncourt prize winner *Un aller simple (A One Way Ticket)*.

Frontiers, on the European continent, have been drastically altered in the past ten years. This is due partly to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, to wars (in the ex-Yugoslavia for example) or also more peacefully to the implementation of treaties signed by the members of the European community. Three successive treaties marked the 1990s as a decade devoted to the redefinition of frontiers and characterized by an international obsession with immigration. While far-right parties have ridden the hobby horse of immigration and xenophobia in the hope of recruiting disillusioned voters, committees and task forces, associations and ministers continue to redefine citizenship, sovereignty, the foreigner, and what it means to migrate. In a simultaneous gesture of opening and closing, Europe currently stresses the concept of "freedom of movement" within its redefined borders, which means increasing controls on the outskirts of its new symbolic territory, in a general atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion that treats all non-Europeans (and especially African, Middle-Eastern or Asian outsiders) as potentially undesirable parasites.

The three treaties in question are the 1992 Maastricht treaty, the Schengen agreements, and the 1997 Amsterdam treaty, which encompasses the previous ones. The Maastricht treaty emphasized the economic identity of the new European market and created a supra-national territory designed to improve the circulation of goods rather than of people, which means that the issue of hospitality was de-emphasized. Yet, some of the "titles" clearly signaled the intention to move from the European Economic Community to the European Union, from EC to EU. Titles V and VI made it clear that the free circulation of goods was a first stage and that the member states planned to institute common foreign and security policies (i.e. to harmonize laws on immigration although the issue remains invisible in title V).¹

The Schengen agreements went further and marked the limits of a new zone of cooperation within which freedom of movement was guaranteed to individuals, as long as they were able to cross the reinforced frontiers of the Schengen community. Signed

in 1985, but implemented only five years after the 1990 convention regarding the application of common policies, the Schengen agreements contributed to the creation of a European entity whose philosophical (and therefore political and practical) goal was increased freedom within, and reinforced control on the supra-national border line: cooperation between states takes the form of international systems of identification and data-collection that leave many non-Europeans and Europeans worried and suspicious of the new computerized Big Brother, the so-called S.I.S or "Système d'information Schengen."²

Ratified on June 17, 1997, the Amsterdam treaty was a re-writing of the European constitution. Regarding migration policies, the following was stipulated:

1. Open frontiers for people in the European Union:

Identity checks at the internal frontiers of the European Union will be abolished over the next five years, except at the borders of Ireland and the United Kingdom. Controls at external frontiers, ports and airports will of course be maintained and will be implemented with equal vigor throughout the European Union.

2. A European policy on visas, asylum and immigration:

Over the next five years, the member states of the European Union will harmonize their rules on issuing visas and granting asylum to people from outside the European Union. This also applies to the rules on immigration. For instance, minimum European norms will apply to the reception of asylum-seekers, and every member state must provide at least adequate food and accommodation.³

The 1992 Maastricht treaty, the implementation of the Schengen agreements in 1995, and the 1997 Amsterdam treaty force Europe to reinvent or adapt the notion of hospitality in a way that both draws on, and departs from, a cultural norm that is only vaguely present in Europeans' minds but exists nonetheless (see Starobinski, *Largesse*). It is a tradition of hospitality that eclectically combines Greek, Roman, and Judeo-Christian references. It is surely no coincidence that a number of important books have recently been published on topics directly, or at least marginally, related to hospitality: in *De l'hospitalité*, Jacques Derrida dialogues with Anne Dufourmantelle and recapitulates the ele-

ments of a seminar taught at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, and in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*—the address that Derrida prepared when Levinas died—the philosopher specifically touches on the issue of immigration and refugees. Historians, journalists, and sociologists have also collaborated on collective projects in which they reflect on hospitality from different angles (see Fassin et al).

One of the characteristics of this historical junction is that hospitality has become the privileged metaphor for immigration. It is so prevalent that we even tend to forget that it is a metaphor. When France thinks of itself as “une terre d’accueil” ‘a land of welcome,’ when we talk about asylum, or about immigrants “knocking on our doors,” whenever the media relay those powerful little sentences that ministers seem to improvise for the benefit of an imagined conservative and xenophobic voter, the analogy between the state and private house, between the government and the host, is implicitly reinforced. In a public speech, a French Minister of the Interior referred to immigrants as those people who “walk into our houses, make themselves at home, open the fridge and help themselves” (Fassin et al 263).

But the parallel between the immigrant and the guest, between the state and the host, is culturally significant and it has consequences that will tend to remain unexplored if we do not pay attention to their invisibility and hegemonic transparency. Because the portrait of the immigrant as ill-mannered guest is such an odious caricature, it is of course tempting to concentrate on the negative effect of the image and to propose a counter-vision of the immigrant as good, polite, and industrious guest. But isn’t the very notion of the immigrant as guest to be rejected?

The idea that immigrants are “guests” obscures the fact that the reason why they were “invited” had nothing to do with hospitality (and this is even more obvious in Germany where the oxymoron “guest-worker” has become one word). After the Second World War, when the most significant migrations of non-Europeans started, the so-called invitations had more to do with active recruitment. Unskilled laborers who helped build the *Banlieues* (or French suburbs) in the 1950s and 60s have not been treated as

I wonder, then, why the metaphor of hospitality came to sound even remotely appropriate: does someone who works for Microsoft feel as though he or she is a guest of the firm? It is interesting that the distinction between being hired and being invited, being a worker and being a guest, could be so easily erased, especially after a European nineteenth century of class struggle where the identity of the worker was defined in opposition to the dominant classes, to the boss. Ultimately, the confusion leads to cynical re-definitions of servitude as gift (as if, for example, in Sembène Ousmane's *La noire de . . .* the main character, who is a live-in maid, was described as an ungrateful guest).⁴

Shouldn't a guest be implicitly imagined as a potential equal who could, eventually, reciprocate at a later date, in a different space, in a different time? To confuse the distinction between guest and worker is to continue to think of the relationship as asymmetrical (the boss has power over the worker and the host has power over the guest) and, perhaps more importantly, it means depriving the so-called guest of the type of contract that exists in a business-like relationship. Capitalist democracies take pride in the fact that if you are a tenant, or a worker, you are not at the mercy of the benevolent host who has the power to invite or disinvite, to allow you to stay or kick you out. The metaphor of hospitality blurs the distinction between a discourse of rights and a discourse of generosity, the language of social contracts and the language of excess and gift-giving. The former should always replace the latter, but the implicit valorization of excess and gift-giving and generosity masks ruthless practices of non-rights that cultural critics may find sadly ironic.

For a long time, the state tolerated newly-arrived immigrant housing conditions that were often much worse than what the newcomers had experienced at home, even if their rural areas were plagued by poverty. In the France of the 50s and 60s, huge *bidonvilles* 'shantytowns' gave a strange twist to the idea that the nation provided the equivalent of a house. If anyone other than the state, such as other immigrants, provided housing, even that practice was sometimes exploitative rather than generous.

Today, the constant reference to state hospitality continues to hide the fact that literal acts of hospitality are constantly going on

but at the private level: what is called “chain migration” means that previously arrived immigrants take their relatives into their homes.⁵ Immigrants often live with other immigrants at first. So if someone can be called the host, it is not the state or the government but the individual who accepts the responsibility of taking care of relatives, or people from the same village. It is still the case that hospitality is *granted* to immigrants by their fellow immigrants, by individuals who have settled, even if precariously. For the state to take credit for that type of hospitality, when it is in fact making sure that individuals have to go through endless administrative hoops before this practice becomes legal, is an interesting displacement of the concept of state hospitality.⁶ The most problematic aspect of the metaphor of state hospitality when applied to immigration may thus be that in times when the official policy advocates “inhospitality,” the individual, whose hospitality was originally the model for state hospitality, is now expected to abide by the state’s inhospitable norm.

Two closely connected issues further complicate the relationship between hospitality and immigration, and I would like to keep them in mind before turning to Van Cauwelaert’s *Un aller simple*. In many cultures, the definition of hospitality seems to be closely linked to the definition of transaction, exchange, and gift, and to the ways in which one can distinguish between gifts and economic exchange. That is why it is almost impossible to talk about hospitality without mentioning generosity and economy. The dominant patterns of exchange between individuals represent the horizon of the debate on hospitality. Hospitality is always caught between two ideals; on the one hand, we can imagine it as an infinite, unconditional, selfless, and endless gift (of your time, of your space, of your resources) or, on the other hand, it can be conceptualized as a well-balanced exchange of mutual services. Consequently, the way in which a group defines what is owed to each individual and what belongs to the category of excess conditions how hospitality is conceived. A direct consequence is that private and state hospitality are also to be compared with professional hospitality: the model of the hotel, of the hospital, and all similar institutions that provide hospitality as a service also rep-

resent a pole of attraction or of repulsion that has to be kept in mind when metaphors are used to describe the situation of immigrants.

And also directly linked to this ambiguity is the issue of gender. Women are always a sensitive component of every definition of exchange. Many texts have been written either on women and gifts or on women as gifts: Marcel Mauss's essay on the gift and Lévi-Strauss's readings come to mind, but they have been reread and criticized by Hélène Cixous's "Sorties" in the *Newly Born Woman* and by Luce Irigaray's "The Mechanics of Fluids" in *This Sex Which is Not One*. In secular and religious myths, in stories and history, the woman of the house is very often imagined as a part of the exchange, rather than as a subject capable of hospitality. Her body is the only home she can share, and often she is offered or forbidden by the male host (think of Lot and his neighbors, of Pasolini's *Teorema*, of Renoir's *Boudu sauvé des eaux*). And yet, one of the ultimate models of hospitality is the mother's body. That contradiction is certainly one of the most painful elements of Van Cauwelaert's *Un aller simple*, to which I will now turn.

Un aller simple received the Goncourt prize in 1994, just after the 1993 Pasqua and Méhaignerie laws imposed two sets of new policies that restricted access to French nationality for children of immigrants and generally enforced more and more restrictive regulations whose objectives were to convince the public that the government's goal was "zero (illegal) immigration" (the qualifier "illegal" was sometimes dropped during Pasqua's public speeches) (Naïr). As his name does not indicate, Van Cauwelaert is a French writer from the Hexagon; he is based in Nice. Written in the witty and humorous tradition of Emile Ajar's *La Vie devant soi*, this book tells the tragic story of a young man deported to Morocco by the French police, who think that he is an immigrant. The French government also sends Jean-Pierre, a so-called "humanitarian attaché," on a mission to accompany Aziz back to his village of origin in Morocco and to help him reinsert himself. This unlikely pair is on a collision course with absurdity because the village in question does not even exist. The name was invented

by the person who forged Aziz's passport. For the child was born in France, quite possibly to French parents, although he cannot prove anything because he spent his youth and adolescence among Gypsies who adopted him as an infant when both his mother and father died in a car accident. "The car model was Ami 6 and its race, Citroën, so they called me Ami 6, as a reminder. Those are my origins if you will" (6).⁷

This novel addresses the direct consequences of immigration policies on a character who is not an immigrant but who is not a national either, a character who could be any one of us, because no one knows who he really is, because he symbolizes the principle of substitution, of interchangeability (that is, as Derrida would say, the principle of the hostage).⁸

Emphasizing the possibility of substitution is one powerful way of questioning the legitimacy of identities and nationalities, and in *Un aller simple*, the author carries the idea to interesting extremes. Jean-Pierre, the Frenchman, the official representative of the government, once left his family never to return. He will die in Morocco, and when Aziz decides to bring the body back to his parents, a rather surrealistic coincidence occurs. First, Aziz rents a car which happens to be of the same "race," as he puts it, as the car of his origins: it is a "fourgon Citroën," a Citroën, like the car in which his parents died. Besides, for reasons that I don't really want to talk about in order not to spoil the story, Aziz can never bring himself to tell Jean-Pierre's parents the truth about his death. So, just as Jean-Pierre was taking Aziz back to an imaginary village, Aziz invents a narrative that will replace Jean-Pierre's banal existence. He pretends that he was held hostage (another role of interchangeability) by ferocious Moroccan terrorists. And as if that story had acquired a life of its own, when Aziz leaves the parents' house wondering what he is going to do with Jean-Pierre's body, he realizes that the Citroën has disappeared, as if the vanishing of the second Citroën ultimately closed a strange circle of hospitality. Jean-Pierre, who insisted on giving Aziz his real country, who wanted to use his own voice to tell Aziz's story, will eventually be able to speak about Aziz/himself through the body of Aziz, who is now willing to write the novel that Jean-Pierre wanted

to write: "Jean-Pierre wanted to write a novel where he would say 'I' with my voice. In the end, I think this novel is being written. I even have a hunch that the author is feeling more and more at home within my own body" (118).⁹

The policemen who deport Aziz need the media and the government to believe that justice has been done, that order has been restored, that the illegal immigrant has been returned to his country of origin, but that story, in its simplicity, in its purity, cannot be told. Not only because Aziz is the essence of irregularity but because the novel insists that irregularity, homelessness, rootlessness are, if not interchangeable, at least shared by the would-be immigrant and the most documented of all characters, the official representative of the French government on a mission to enforce immigration laws.

In *Un aller simple*, all immigration issues are viewed as related to one other key factor: Aziz spent his childhood among Gypsies, an archetypal diasporic people. Like his community of adoption, Aziz is both potentially always homeless and perfectly well integrated, and his fate is that of a guest among guests. Complex relationships of hospitality develop between Aziz and the Gypsies, and they are mirrored by relationships between Aziz and Marseille or France, or between the Gypsies and the French. The novel shows how homelessness can always be combined with, rather than opposed to, belonging. *Un aller simple* shows to what extent outsiders are also insiders, to what extent homeless individuals can also be hosts. And by "to what extent," I mean "according to which different rules and conventions."

For the novel is obviously not an analysis of Gypsies, and if a reader is looking for a reliable ethnographic document, he or she is bound to be disappointed. *Un aller simple* has nothing to do with Isabel Fonseca's *Bury Me Standing* for example, or with recent French films on Gypsy communities such as the trilogy by Tony Gatlif.¹⁰ What Van Cauwelaert's novel does achieve, however, is an exploration of the constantly interlocking identities of communities perceived as "ethnic" by the dominant French constructions of Frenchness. Even if Aziz is a fictive Moroccan, even if the Gypsies, here, are also a fictive invention, and even if the French are also exposed as stereotyped by their own narratives,

each group interacts with the others, as minorities or as majorities, depending on the context.¹¹

Traditionally, we assume that the owner of the land has the power to grant hospitality. That element of (often illusory) power carries the risk of allowing perverse forms of hospitality to develop where the host flaunts his bourgeois wealth to his poor relations or when the King levels exorbitant taxes partly to organize ritual “largesse” during which he throws gold coins literally out of the window (see *Largesse*, Starobinski). In Van Cauwelaert’s *Un aller simple*, Gypsies do not grant hospitality because they are in power or because they can afford to raise another child. At first, they even lie to Aziz, pretending that he was found in the back seat of a stolen car. In an ironic manipulation of the old cliché that gypsies steal children from Christians, the novel explains that Aziz is “un enfant trouvé par erreur” ‘a foundling by mistake’ or ‘a case of mistaken foundling’ (5).

What is particularly unexpected and also humorous is that there is no attempt at idealizing the Gypsy community that plays the role of host community when the unnamed child loses his parents. No exoticism turns the Gypsies into the better model of solidarity that survives in spite of pressures to assimilate into a supposedly degraded Western culture. What *Un aller simple* describes is hostile hospitality, a strange mixture of the contradictory etymological roots of the word host (*hospes* and *hostis*, the host and the enemy, hostility and hospitality belong to the same family [Schérer 102]). In *Un aller simple*, the Gypsies’ hospitality is a form of acceptance that is never unconditional, that is always likely to be denied. In other words, the type of hospitality granted to Aziz by the Gypsy community is far from ideal.

First of all, the gesture of welcoming is not unanimous, to say the least. There is disagreement among the community whose majority does not wish to take care of the child that the “old Vasile” brings back to the neighborhood after the car crash. Only Vasile wants to adopt the baby. Here is how the narrator explains why he was finally allowed to grow up among them:

There were no identification papers in the glove compartment so [Vasile] thought that I was a sign from Heaven. Nobody contra-

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dicted him because he was already very ancient at the time and according to our customs, the old geezers are wise. (6)¹²

I should perhaps point out that the old man is clearly not meant to be read as a typical Gypsy. Van Cauwelaert's novel is marked by facetiousness, and I doubt that we should interpret this as a critique of "real" Gypsies. Yet the old Vasile does represent one model, one tradition that could be European if Europe were not reneging on that ideal. Vasile's definition of hospitality goes back to ancient Greece, where the foreigner is supposed to be treated as if he had been sent by the Gods. Vasile wants to respect a law that has obviously fallen into disuse but that his presence can maintain alive for a few more years. This is the type of hospitality that the *Odyssey* talks about, a law that demands that you receive strangers without even asking who they are, regardless of whether they are deserving or not, poor or not. There is an element of coercion in the obligation (the fear, for example, of offending a God), but that definition of hospitality is also on the side of infinite gift, it is not measured or justified through economic or political interest. According to René Schérer, the author of *Zeus hospitalier: Eloge de l'hospitalité*, Plato "puts hospitality at the top of the obligations prescribed to citizens. It is a sacred law which cannot be transgressed for fear of incurring the wrath of Gods" (Schérer 11).¹³

Vasile's beliefs, however, are not shared by his community. If they respect his desires, it is out of a mandatory deference to his status as an elder. Their compliance with his demands is almost disrespectful. As Derrida puts it, it is impolite to be polite out of politeness.¹⁴ It is clear that their willingness to obey Vasile is mixed with contempt. Here Vasile is both treated as a senile old man whose opinions are not valued and as a representative of a class to which tradition grants power.

The contradiction between several sets of values is not solved: the novel does not condone the systematic alliance between age and power (even Aziz knows that his protector is "gâteux" ['senile'], as he puts it), but it does not present the old man's definition of hospitality as old-fashioned and no longer valid.

The community as a whole only grudgingly accepts Vasile's law of hospitality but does not believe in it, does not understand it. Yet an omniscient voice, almost behind the narrator's back, suggests that the old man knows exactly what he is doing but that his beliefs have become incomprehensible to his community. He views the child as a divine messenger, as a Christ-like figure, whose lack of conventional origin is the very reason why he should be treated like a divine host. When Aziz learns the truth about how he was accepted by the Gypsies, he visits the old man to thank him. But neither this I-narrator nor the community as a whole seem capable of understanding the biblical references that Vasile uses to respond to Aziz's thanks, a quotation from the Catholic liturgy: "begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made" (7).¹⁵ Paradoxically, his superior knowledge is misconstrued as senility, although the novel does not rule out that communication between the old man and the others has broken down altogether, perhaps due to his inability to convey his message. The voice that defends hospitality is thus both on the side of senility and on the side of wisdom.

Later, when Aziz must seek the clan's approval to marry Lila, Vasile's status and senility are mentioned again to explain the results of the vote: "there was a vote in the elders' caravan. I won by two ballots, both cast by the old Vasile who does not remember his name but who has the right to vote twice because of his age" (20).¹⁶

This type of election could be seen as a parody of democracy in the sense that Aziz does not have the support of the group. The result of this vote (that supposedly authorizes an intercommunity marriage, cultural hybridization) underscores the fact that Aziz owes his precarious position to one individual and not to the collective will of the people. Here, hospitality depends on one person's vote, a situation which the novel describes in all its ambiguity, preserving the contradiction between the cause and the consequence: the cause is Vasile's apparently irresponsible vote, the result is the granting of the ultimate form of hospitality by a reluctant group. This moment is not a happy moment of consensus but a moment when a community grudgingly obeys a law of

hospitality in which it no longer believes. I wonder if Van Cauwelaert is suggesting that it is still possible for a group to grant hospitality even if that choice is not the most popular option, even if the community as a whole does not seem to believe in hospitality. Needless to say, the parallel has interesting consequences in a country where right-wing and left-wing governments turn the so-called “immigration problem” into an electoral platform. Here, hospitality is not a gift, it does not mean acceptance, and it is not the same thing as love. It coexists with exclusion, and it can be betrayed.

Van Cauwelaert’s text also asks pointed questions about the relationship between gender and hospitality. Here, women are often a barometer of hospitality because the group does not let them act as agents capable of granting or denying hospitality. In other words, they constitute part of the exchange of favors that the guest and the host negotiate as gifts, signs and symbols. The idea that women are exchanged seems primitive and old-fashioned, and we would be, I suppose, quite happy to imagine that such sexist practices only occur in countries that we continue to think of as underdeveloped and uncivilized, including such countries that have become the stranger within. In the case of Van Cauwelaert’s novel, the role attributed to the Gypsy community may deceive the reader into adopting a narrowly ethnic approach that would condemn the ways in which women are treated by that particular group. What happens to Aziz and to Lila can be interpreted from a traditionally Eurocentric and pseudo-anthropological point of view. Aziz and Lila have fallen in love, but both characters seem convinced from day one that they will never be able to marry because a Gypsy woman must marry a Gypsy man. Even after Lila’s official fiancé is killed by a security guard, Aziz is still not accepted as a potential suitor, and without ever spelling it out, the omniscient voice suggests that the clan is responsible for Aziz’s arrest and deportation. Aziz was not a dissident force in this instance; he was not trying to break any rule, to go against tradition. He respects sexual taboos, and agrees to buy his woman from her brothers for “a dozen Pioneer CD players and forty Bose speakers” (20).¹⁷ The specific reference to brand names and the choice of the objects that will constitute the woman’s price gives a

new twist to this supposedly timeless fashion of exchanging females for goods and reminds the reader that these Gypsies are also post-industrial capitalists. Aziz abides by the laws not because he believes in their logic but because they are laws. He says, “sometimes, the Gypsies are bizarre: they would rather a woman spend all her life alone, in dishonor, bringing them shame, rather than sell her at discount to a Gadjo who will erase the stain by taking her away” (20).¹⁸ So, it is not because he represents ideological dissidence that he is suddenly excluded and expelled, that hospitality is suddenly denied in the cruelest way. He has not betrayed the host’s trust. But his foreignness sets limits to how much he can ever hope to belong. At the very moment when a man and a woman are acting as subjects who want to personally redefine the laws of belonging, the group intervenes, using the woman as pawn in a game where men impose community practices of hospitality. In this case, the Gypsy community goes even further: it appeals to the larger inhospitable French society to do the dirty job. One law of inhospitality is used to enforce another law of inhospitality. Individual subjects are not free to rewrite the agreements.

The structure of this betrayal reminds the reader that the opposition between minority and majority is not enough to predict structures of alliances and solidarity. We already know that even hospitality among immigrants sometimes means ruthless exploitation. Here Van Cauwelaert cautions the reader against the idealization of minority practices. And the fact that Van Cauwelaert first places this Russian doll model within the Gypsy community is an interesting narrative set up: readers, tempted by an exoticized reading, who would conclude from the passage that this is a Gypsy problem, would be in for a surprise, because in the second part of the novel, when Jean-Pierre, the humanitarian attaché, starts telling his story to Aziz, we realize that the same abuse of power has taken place within the French administration: in Jean-Pierre’s case, a man (his direct supervisor) who wanted to sleep with his wife, Clémentine, shamelessly used his authority and the official discourse of immigration and cooperation to get rid of him. On the one hand, Jean-Pierre parrots the government’s official party line. Just like Aziz, who was willing to buy Lila and to provide the

agreed-upon number of stolen car radios, Jean-Pierre does not even try to fight against the immigration politics adopted by his community. He is capable of reciting the mantra of inhospitality by heart:

. . . the government has inaugurated a procedure which is not only inscribed in a discourse of dignity but also seeks to be effective at the level of results, for the ultimate goal is not to make you leave a country after asking you to come when you were needed, but to show you, with the necessary help, that now, your country needs you, because the only way of stopping migrating flows from the Maghreb is to build a future in your country, through a politics of incentives to development both at the industrial level and at the level of human resources and . . . (32-33)¹⁹

This parody of what the French call “*langue de bois*” ‘administralese’ is Van Cauwelaert’s critique of devious hypocrisy. But what I want to emphasize in this passage is the perfectly plausible cohabitation of this official discourse on state inhospitality and of a more private agenda that drives the implementation of the larger project to the point that it corrupts and undermines its most basic foundations.

For Jean-Pierre slowly reveals that his mission has everything to do with the fact that his wife is having an affair. At first, he explains that he had to leave: “I was quite clear about it: as soon as she told me she had someone else! I left. I took a suitcase, a word processor, and I checked into a hotel” (45).²⁰

And when Jean-Pierre rhetorically asks Aziz if he should have rebelled and resisted, nothing suggests that he appreciates the irony of an answer which refers as much to Aziz’s as to Jean-Pierre’s situation: “I answered that life does not always give you enough time to react and besides, there is pride (45).²¹ And if the reader was still not picking up on the fact that Aziz and Jean-Pierre are victims of the same sexist structures that they are unable to contest before they are affected by them, the humanitarian attaché reveals that the man who forces him to leave his own house is also his direct supervisor: “He is her lover, Loupiac. The associate press attaché at the *Ministry*. He sent me on a mission to get rid of me” (45-46).²²

One of the most vexing and invisible problems raised by immigration laws is the existence of an unacknowledged level of human interpretation between the legislation and the administrator who applies texts and makes judgment calls. If the philosophy of the Law is supposed to be self-evident and govern application decrees, it is clear that implementation is always mediated by culture, i.e., today, by a generalized atmosphere of suspicion and xenophobia. Van Cauwelaert's novel goes even further. It suggests that policies are also betrayed by private agendas that uncannily reveal the self-serving and egotistical logic that generated the law. Both Jean-Pierre and Aziz are the victims of a form of institutional sexism that they were paradoxically willing to accept.

The novel thus raises intriguing questions about the contradictions between collective hospitality and private hospitality: *Un aller simple* suggests that state or community inhospitality is sometimes used as a pretext to continue to ensure that certain unwritten laws are perpetuated. By crossing the issue of hospitality with questions of nationality and ethnicity, by introducing a minority group and a minority character that a narrative creates as a stranger among strangers, *Un aller simple* reflects on the current European situation where both supra- and sub-national identities fight for recognition. The description of unexpected forms of hospitality (and especially hostile hospitality that cannot not be confused with acceptance, love, and affection) redraws certain mental boundaries and forces us to rethink the intersection between hospitality and generosity, hospitality and self-interest. Sometimes, hospitality is a dissident option, the choice of one individual who may not be able to impose his convictions for very long but who can still make a difference. Again, that suggestion is most relevant in contemporary France where the media has publicized a series of cases that revolved around the issues of sanctuary and the possible sanctions incurred by individuals who harbor illegal immigrants. Finally, *Un aller simple* offers a glimmer of hope on a realistically overcast horizon. The novel knows that all identities are primarily made of narratives, but does not stop on this potentially apolitical postmodern frontier. For example, the fact that

Aziz is “Moroccan” on his documents is not explained away simply in terms of “reality” vs. “narrative.” Aziz knows that he did have a choice between several narratives and that the decision to become “Moroccan” was both contingent and overdetermined, contingent because no one knows where Aziz was really born or who his parents are (and the likelihood of him being Moroccan is slim), but also overdetermined because there was a reason why he did not get a fake French passport: a French passport would have been more expensive than a fake Moroccan passport. The economic consideration underscores that there is also a hospitality of money or cultural capital, and that some narratives are more equal than others. Each human has a right to a nationality, but it is clear that some nationalities are more desirable than others, and that global citizenship does not exist. Aziz’s passport is the emblem of the contradictory mixture of contingency and overdetermination that presides over the state’s philosophy on *jus solis*, immigration and naturalization.

The novel departs from a more conventional discourse on hybridization that insists, for example, that each subject’s legitimacy as a national is relativized by the arbitrariness of narratives of citizenship. Granted, at a certain level, we are all hybrids. Yet that realization alone (and many critics have pointed it out) does not solve the problem of disempowerment and disenfranchisement. Van Cauwelaert turns the tables on hybridization: the point is not so much that we are all strangers, in fact it is almost the opposite: Aziz discovers that anyone can be host but that being the host always involves some kind of appropriation of a territory, or perhaps of a body. He discovers that he is both from nowhere, from an imaginary Moroccan village, and very much from Marseille, and also that he can literally become Jean-Pierre, the Lorrain who ostracized his family. This is not celebrated as a solution: it is inscribed as the cause of tremendous confusion and anxiety. For example, when he discovers that he is about to be deported to a village that does not exist, Aziz says: “Then I said, I am sorry. I don’t mind being an example, but I lived all my life in France as a foreigner and I am not about to start over as a foreigner in a country where I would be the only one to know that I

am not at home" (26).²³ But at times, the possibility of being in without belonging or of being out without being excluded is also a source of pleasure, the infinite hospitality of knowledge. At school, Aziz discovers that he can cherish countries and nations to which he does not belong: "The greatest reward for me was to learn about the geography and the climates of a country, not because it is where you come from but simply because it exists" (10).²⁴

Notes

1. Available online: <http://europa.eu.int/en/record/mt/top.html>. See especially title V and title VI of the Maastricht treaty.
2. For a detailed explanation of the Schengen agreement, see http://gov.austriainfo.at/ForeignAffairs/intern/s4scheng_e.html. See especially the agreements about a common visa policy and a common policy on illegal migration. See also, in French, <http://www.ib.be/euro/cee/francais/mieux/droit/schengen.html>. For an angry and perceptive account of what Schengen does to non-Europeans, especially when they come from Africa, see Samir Raafat's "The Darker Side of Schengen," *The Egyptian Mail*, June 3, 1995 (available online: <http://www.privacytools.com/schengl.html>). Attempts were made to anticipate objections or to reassure the public in brochures that explain the "SIS": "Le S.I.S. n'est pas une menace pour notre vie privée." (<http://www.ib.be/euroj/cee/francais/mieux/droit/schengen.html>: Dépliant un vent de liberté souffle sur l'Europe - L'Europe ça me touche - Le Ministère des Affaires Etrangères [Service Accords de Schengen] - E. Goffin - Rue des Quatre Bras 2 - 1000, Bruxelles).
3. Available online: <http://www.bz.niinbuza.nl/english/Policy/amstfact.html>.
4. See also the reemergence of this apparently obsolete character in Jean-Marie Le Clézio's *Poisson d'or* or in *L'Odeur de la papaye verte*.
5. See Courade 1997 as well as recent films such as Merzak Allouache's *Salut cousin!*
6. For recent parliamentary debates on what should become of the infamous "certificat d'hébergement," see Jean-Baptiste de Montvalon's "La majorité obtient la suppression des certificats d'hébergement," *Le*

Monde (Saturday 13 December 1997) and Philippe Bernard and Nathaniel Herzberg's "La disparition du pouvoir de contrôle des maires sur l'immigration," *Le Monde* (Saturday 13 December 1997). For testimonies on the practical consequences of the "certificat," see a text signed "Une Malgache": "La grandeur de la France à l'aune d'un consulat," *Politique Africaine 67: La France et les migrants africains* (octobre 1997) 63-65, and Philippe Viledier, "L'honneur de désobéir, immigration et conscience citoyenne," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 1997, 17.

7. All translations from the French are mine, unless otherwise noted. The French reads: "La voiture était une Ami 6 de race Citroën, alors on m'a appelé Ami 6, en souvenir. Ce sont mes origines, quoi."

8. L'otage, c'est d'abord quelqu'un dont l'unicité endure la possibilité d'une substitution. [...] L'hôte est un otage en tant qu'il est sujet mis en question, obsédé (assiégé), persécuté, dans le lieu même où il a lieu, là où, émigré, exilé, étranger, hôte de toujours il se trouve élu à domicile avant d'élire domicile. (Derrida *Adieu à*, 103)

The hostage is first of all someone whose unicity endures the possibility of a substitution. . . . The guest . . . is a hostage insofar as he is a subject put into question, obsessed (and thus besieged), persecuted, in the very place where he takes place, where as exile, stranger, a guest . . . from the very beginning, he finds himself elected to, or taken up by, a residence . . . before himself electing or taking one up. (Derrida, *Adieu to* 55-56)

9. The French reads: "Finalement, ce roman que Jean-Pierre voulait écrire en disant 'je' avec ma voix, je crois qu'il est en train de naître. J'ai même l'impression que l'auteur se sent de mieux en mieux dans ma peau."

10. See Tony Gatlif's trilogy ("Latcho Drom," a 1993 documentary on Gypsy music, "Mondo," a 1996 adaptation of Jean-Marie Le Clézio's story, and "Gadjo Dilo," the third part of the trilogy, aka "L'Etranger fou," 1997, an interesting reversal of the immigrant trope: here the French Gypsy emigrates), see also Chuz Gutiérrez's 1996 "Alma Gitana" (Spain) or Andrei Mlakar's 1995 "Halgato" (Slovenia).

11. In "Ethnicity on the French Frontier," Winifred Woodhull suggests that "minority literature and scholarship in France have devoted considerable attention to the divisions *within* ethnic groups and have thus called into question essentialist notions of ethnic identity. So far,

however, they have not explored the relations *between* ethnic groups in a critical, productive way” (Woodhull 48).

12. The French reads: “Comme il n’y avait pas de papiers dans la boîte à gants, il pensait que j’étais un signe de ciel. On ne l’a pas contrarié, parce qu’il était déjà très ancien, à l’époque, et dans nos coutumes c’est le gâteux qui a la sagesse.”

13. The French reads: “place l’hospitalité au premier rang des obligations prescrites aux citoyens. Elle est un devoir sacré que l’on ne peut enfreindre sous peine d’encourir la punition des dieux.”

14. See also Alain Caillé’s “Une soirée à ‘l’Ambroisie’: Rudiments d’une analyse structurale du don”: “L’obligation de donner est intrinsèquement paradoxale puisqu’elle n’est autre que celle d’être spontané. Un don purement obligatoire n’en est pas un” (Caillé 109).

15. The Niceano-Constantinopolitan Creed: “Engendré et non pas créé, de même nature que le Père et par Lui tout a été fait.” The first part of the Creed was written during the First Ecumenical Council held in Nicea, Asia Minor, in A.D. 325. The second part of the Creed (beginning with “I believe in the Holy Spirit . . .”) was written during the Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in A.D. 318. The English text is that used in the Byzantine Catholic Churches in North America. The Creed is proclaimed during every Divine Liturgy.

16. The French reads: “Il y a eu un vote dans la caravane des anciens, et j’ai gagné par deux voix—celles du vieux Vasile, qui ne sait plus comment il s’appelle mais qui vote double à cause de l’âge.”

17. The French reads: “douze Pioneer laser and quarante enceintes Bose.”

18. The French reads: “Ils sont drôles, parfois, les Manouches: ils préfèrent qu’une fille reste déshonorée à vie, toute seule, et leur donne la honte, plutôt que de la solder à un gadjo qui effacera la tache en l’emmenant loin d’eux.”

19. The French reads: “le gouvernement inaugure une procédure qui non seulement s’inscrit dans un cadre de dignité, mais aspire à être efficace au plan du résultat, car le but en soi n’est pas de vous faire quitter un territoire où nous vous avons fait venir quand nous avons besoin de vous, c’est de vous montrer, avec toute l’aide nécessaire, que c’est votre pays maintenant qui a besoin de vous, car le seul moyen de stopper le flux migratoire en provenance du Maghreb est de vous

construire un avenir chez vous, par une politique d'incitation au développement, tant sur le plan industriel et que sur le plan des ressources humaines et. . . ."

The interruption (Aziz says he "breaks down") is triggered by the fact that he was about to admit that a recent TV show "Marseille ville arabe" was the real motivation for the operation launched in Marseille. Naturally, his rehearsed discourse is irrelevant since neither Aziz nor his ancestors are part of this "you" that "we" needed. Yet it is interesting to note that the official hypocritical recognition of a debt is used to better skirt the issue of reparation. Not only is the discourse of reverse hospitality (we are making you feel at home in your own country) tainted with sordid media manipulations but the novel exposes the sheer irrelevance of this collective dogma at the level of individuals.

20. The French reads: "J'ai pourtant été clair: du jour où elle m'a dit qu'elle avait quelqu'un, je suis parti! J'ai pris une valise, un traitement de texte, et je suis allé à l'hôtel."

21. The French reads: "J'ai répondu que dans la vie, on n'avait pas toujours le temps de réagir, et qu'on avait sa fierté."

22. The French reads: "C'est son amant, Loupiac. Le directeur adjoint de la Presse au Ministère. Il m'a fait envoyer en mission pour être tranquille."

23. The French reads: "Alors là, j'ai dit: pardon. Je veux bien être un exemple, mais j'ai fait ma vie comme étranger en France; je ne vais pas la recommencer comme étranger dans un pays où je serai le seul à savoir que je ne suis pas chez moi."

24. The French reads: "La plus belle récompense pour moi c'était d'apprendre le relief et le climat d'un pays pas seulement parce qu'on en vient, mais simplement parce qu'il existe."

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