

La Ronde des hirondelles

Florence Cuschieri

Chose Commune, €38

Swallows migrate from South Africa to Europe in spring, travelling through Congo, the Sahara, Morocco, Spain and France; their path was therefore echoed, at least in part, by the migrants in *La Ronde des hirondelles*, whose title translates as the round (or 'dance') of the swallows. But, as Florence Cuschieri points out, where swallows can go back and forth, these undocumented individuals have no freedom of movement.

La Ronde des hirondelles is a quiet book, sizable but printed softback; many of the images show woods and forests, the sheer number suggesting the innumerable, shots sometimes butting into each other's spreads as if pushing beyond the contained. There is a sense of not being able to see the wood for the trees, or of simply being lost, also borne out in short quotes from those who have made the trip from Italy to France. Travelling through the mountains they are forced to hide and travel by night; if they are caught in France, they will be ejected, and if their applications for asylum are rejected, they will live like this long-term.

Cuschieri frequently travels between Italy and France, and first noticed police border checks on the bus; for her a hike through the mountains is about 10km, she writes, but for those migrating it is a circuitous

26km trip. Tracing their route by day, she befriended a group living in a safe house high up, dubbed Chez Marcel; images of Mohamed, Youcef, Mustapha, Ahmed, Ali, Khalid, Tierno and others punctuate the book, breaking out into delicate colour. Their faces are almost always obscured.

Quotes from these individuals are reproduced in Arabic, French and English on the back of smaller, sharper monochrome shots of the house; their insights are pithy but melancholy, guides to a difficult life. "As the saying goes: 'Choose your friends before the journey'," reads one. "It's a well-known maxim among migrants." "They don't care about you. If they stop you, they steal everything you have, beat you and throw you away," reads another.

In fact, relationships good and bad underpin much of what these individuals say, throwing Cuschieri's own friendship with them into relief. Projects in which outsiders photograph the vulnerable are now often questioned, for good reason, but Cuschieri's book speaks up for solidarity, for walking in someone else's shoes. It includes spending time with people at home, playing games or eating soup, admiring a cat on a chair. **BJP**
chosecommune.com

Spread from *La Ronde des hirondelles*
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