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Living in a country like Italy as the daughter of a black migrant woman is not easy: when people ask me whether my mother is my baby-sitter, or I have heard since kindergarten that my mother is as black as shit...

I have met a lot of migrant women in the last few years: asylum-seekers, refugees, victims of human trafficking, transgender prostitutes and victims of violence. I have helped them to find accommodation and work – basically they were wanting to get out of situations of violence and finally become autonomous – and I have accompanied them in their empowerment process.

In this sense I call myself a bridge-builder: because I assist women migrants in regaining their lost dignity and build a bridge between them and a society that seems to reject them. A society that is becoming more and more racist and class-conscious, where it seems that the concepts of empathy and solidarity no longer exist. A society that allocates fewer and fewer resources to save human lives, with the consequence that people have to organize themselves. That was what happened in Italy with the human corridor project, for example, which was the result of cooperation between Catholic and Protestant Christians. In recent years the Mediterranean has become a giant cemetery; according to the “Fortress Europe” Observatory, between 1988 and February 2016 28,000 people found a watery grave while trying to reach Italy. This is a real tragedy.

Without claiming to resolve this age-old question, the humanitarian corridor project takes on political significance: consolidating the Italian commitment and that of other European countries to avoid the atrocity of deaths at sea. We are confident that the project may be taken up at a European level - as the frontier of a new, common witness – but that is not enough. Europe still spends too little money on receiving migrants, or rather, it spends money badly: like the 3 billion euro given to Turkey to prevent the Syrians from arriving in Europe.

As Christians I believe that it is our task to welcome migrants and to identify the differences within the migrant groups. Not taking note of differences in the identity of incoming migrants means that they become dehumanised. In our imagination they become objects, bereft of personal stories, of culture and of feelings. They are treated as passive, like objects, not as persons active in organising their own lives. And so we can justify any kind of action concerning them that we would otherwise condemn from a moral standpoint, e.g. letting them drown in the Mediterranean.

I have just given you a figure – I said that between 1988 and 2016 roughly 28,000 people lost their lives. Twenty-eight thousand. Let us try for a moment to imagine 28,000 faces, 28,000 life stories, 28,000 feelings.

There you are – our job as Christians is to see them as persons - and not as objects or statistics. Like Precious, a victim of human trafficking, who looks at me with her enormous eyes and says, “I want to get out of this situation. I want to be free”. If we don’t take Precious by the hand and accompany her on a pathway of liberation from sexual exploitation then we will also be a party to it.

Let us remain human, or rather become human again.