

The research project focuses on the story of a family that unfolds in the Horn of Africa and Italy between 1880 and 1962. Through a microhistorical and biographical lens, I aim both to tell the story of the Sengal family and to outline the history of Italian colonialism from its very beginning to postcolonial times. At the center of the investigation are an Ethiopian-Italian father, Sengal Workneh, and his daughter, Elena Sengal, in their roles as intermediaries, translators, and teachers of African languages. A fraught love story between Elena and an Italian official adds an intimate dimension to this historical study of Italian colonialism. First, the project unveils the essential role of intellectual intermediaries in European colonialism and underlines the important contribution they made to the cultural production of the time. Second, it addresses the neglected field of black Italian history and traces the various political and social contexts in which the Sengal family lived. Finally, by looking at two figures of intermediaries between cultures, the project aims to look at Italian colonialism from multiple perspectives and, more broadly, to decenter the history of modern Italy.