

Annick LACROIX, “A social and territorial history of the State in colonized Algeria. Post Office, Telegraphs and Telephones from the mid-19th to the Second World War”, Ph.D. Thesis of contemporary history, directed by Olivier Wieviorka and Raphaëlle Branche, ENS Cachan, 2014, 2 volumes, 970 p.

Through the French Postal and Telecommunication administration’s case study, this research carries out an history of colonial state focused on the Algerian field and on social issues. Between the 1850’s and the Second World War, the communication network kept growing. The way this network was shaped gives an idea of how France took control of the colonized territory and then used communication facilities as a settlement tool to the profit of the European population. In Algeria, the PTT administration was mainly organized on the same model as in France. However, local decision-makers had sometimes to take into account special features of the colonial field.

The Postal and Telecommunication administration offers a complex picture of the colonial society. Men and women, citizens and natives, and people from different social backgrounds were employed there as mailmen, telephone operators, middle managers or postmasters. Users of those services were extremely varied too. This dissertation offers a detailed analysis of interactions at work and within the colonial field. Progressively, letters, telegrams, money orders, and even voice circulated everywhere in Algeria. Although precolonial networks had already carried information and although the PTT waited for the interwar to bring facilities to villages (douars), more and more Algerians gained access to literacy, money exchanges and a new kind of technical modernity.