

# Confronting Different Realities: Libraries in Cabo Verde and the Case for Comparative Librarianship

Marilla MacGregor<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Libraries are institutions whose mission is to both conserve and disseminate information for the purposes of education, culture, and amusement. This paper analyzes the history, politics, culture, economy, and state of education in Cabo Verde, emphasizing the unique situation of libraries and Library and Information Science (LIS) on the islands. Notwithstanding their global mobility, serving the diaspora and the islands implies retaining trained LIS professionals, sustaining digital library platforms and websites, and building collections. In the spirit of comparative librarianship, this paper proposes ways in which Cabo Verde can create a new “mission” for libraries which best serves its people, honors its culture, and helps the nation to flourish in the information age.

## Keywords

Libraries, LIS, information systems, higher education, constitution, Cabo Verde

## Resumo

As bibliotecas são instituições cuja missão é de conservar e disseminar informação para apoiar o ensino, a cultura e o lazer. Através de uma análise da história, política, cultura, economia e o estado do ensino em Cabo Verde, este artigo pretende discutir a situação única de bibliotecas e a Biblioteconomia e Ciência da Informação (LIS) nas ilhas. Apesar da mobilidade global cabo-verdiana, servir as ilhas e a diáspora significa a retenção de profissionais de LIS, manter plataformas e websites de bibliotecas e construir coleções. No espírito da biblioteconomia comparada, este artigo propõe formas para que Cabo Verde possa construir uma nova “missão” para as bibliotecas nas ilhas que melhor sirva a sua população, homenageie a sua cultura e ajude a nação de florescer nesta era da informação.

## Palavras-chave

Bibliotecas, LIS, sistemas de informação, ensino superior, constituição, Cabo Verde

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<sup>1</sup> Hollins University, Roanoke, VA (USA). *E-Mail:* [pianist4444@yahoo.com](mailto:pianist4444@yahoo.com)

## Introduction

Comparative librarianship is the practice of comparing facets of library and information science (LIS) across cultures or societies in an attempt to understand how these facets may work differently from one culture to the next. The aim of this comparison is to expand the horizons of one's conception of LIS with a view to creating theories which will improve librarianship overall (Chandra 2017). However, it is important to realize that each practitioner of comparative librarianship starts—naturally—with the understanding of libraries and LIS which pertains to her/his/their reality. For Western researchers, the results of such comparisons often show that, while there may be differences in LIS across countries and cultures, there are enough similarities, both in the libraries themselves and in the cultures, so that the model these researchers default to when speaking of “libraries, librarianship, and library and information science” can simply be tweaked and adjusted to fit the needs of the “other” being studied. This Western model is based on the notion that libraries—most particularly public libraries—are places that offer free access to information, both for research and pleasure purposes, relying heavily on modern technology for both the organization and dissemination of this information. It thus assumes an infrastructure that provides these resources, including librarians specifically trained to run the institutions, and a population of which the majority is literate and for which reading and digesting information forms part of daily life. Additionally, the model defines libraries as service institutions, often helping to serve the community beyond the realm of literature. However, there are some cases where the very realities of daily life, of what it means to live well and to succeed and how information is used and valued, are so different from the ‘normal’ point of view that the western LIS model—even a modified version of it—does not work, or even ceases to exist.

One such case is found in the country of Cabo Verde, a Lusophone island nation about 350 miles off the west coast of Africa (Fyfe 1981; Carreira 1982). A country that has struggled with drought, famine, colonial domination, and isolation, Cabo Verde is unique in terms of its history, the development of its peoples, and its current reality in the information age. Its indigenous culture is one which was created simultaneously with its colonial culture, as the islands were uninhabited when the Portuguese arrived in the fifteenth century (Challinor 2008; Fyfe 1981), and this alone sets Cabo Verde apart from other Lusophone African nations (except perhaps São Tomé and Príncipe), as well as most other formerly colonized nations in the world. Cabo Verde's created culture and its historical position within the Portuguese Empire changes its reality in terms of language development, cultural history

and traditions, and political positioning. Since language, culture, and politics greatly affect the development of education and the value of information, its dissemination, and of libraries, librarianship, and LIS, in terms of the western model, have played a much different role in the life of Cabo Verdeans than in many other countries. In reviewing the history, politics, culture, economy, and state of education of the country, Cabo Verde reveals itself to be a nation and a culture in which the existence of a completely different reality as the basis for LIS needs to be accepted so that libraries can fulfill their roles of providing access to information, educating communities, and upholding intellectual freedom in the name of universal human rights.

### **Cabo Verde: An Overview**

To understand the state of LIS in Cabo Verde, one must look at its history. The nation of Cabo Verde is composed of a string of ten islands in the Atlantic Ocean, nine of which are inhabited, and is geographically isolated both from mainland Africa and from its nearest neighboring island country, São Tomé and Príncipe (Atchoaréna et al. 2008). The eastern islands are flat and eroded, while the western islands are mountainous and contain one active volcano, the Pico do Fogo (Lobban et al. 2019). Access to fresh water is limited, and the majority of the soils are not suitable for agriculture (Lobban et al. 2019). This, combined with the aridness of the climate and the frequency of droughts, means that the nation is not self-sufficient when it comes to food production (Lobban et al. 2019; Keese 2008; CountryWatch Incorporated 2020). The islands are also vulnerable to torrential flooding, when rain does occur, as well as other natural disasters (Lobban et al. 2019).

It was within this harsh climate that the population and culture of Cabo Verde was created. Portuguese settlers first landed on the islands in 1460, and by 1495, Cabo Verde had become an official colony of the Portuguese Empire (Fyfe 1981; CountryWatch Incorporated 2020). Over a period of four centuries settlers came to the islands from Portugal, Italy, and Spain, and in the nineteenth century from France, Britain, and other northern European countries, but most of their work force was imported from mainland Africa in the form of African slaves (Fyfe 1981; Carreira 1982)<sup>2</sup>. Asian immigrants, mainly from Goa, were also brought in as doctors, priests, and other types of civil servants.<sup>3</sup> The population that emerged on the islands, therefore, was a mixture of Europeans, Asians,

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<sup>2</sup> Isabel Ferreira, pers. comm., 7 June 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

African slaves, and the descendants of the union of these demographics, a mixture which created racial and class-based tensions (Challinor 2008). As Challinor (2008: 88) points out, this situation “broke down the rigid division between whites and blacks . . . Thus, although skin color initially defined everyone’s position on the social scale, this changed as an intermediate class emerged in society, consisting of creoles and of freed slaves.”

The blurred line of distinction in terms of race put native Cabo Verdeans in a unique position in terms of status within the Portuguese Empire. As Alexander Keese (2007) explains, starting in the nineteenth century, Cabo Verdeans were given more access to western education than the natives of other Portuguese colonies. For example, the Seminário-Liceu de S. Nicolau was founded in 1866 (Neves 2017). This allowed the Portuguese administration to use Cabo Verdeans to help settle other colonies, and often the Cabo Verdeans would be put in low-rank or middle-rank posts in places like Angola and Portuguese Guinea (Keese, 2007). Due to the harsh climate, poor natural resources, and the use of Cabo Verdeans to populate other colonies, migration from the islands slowly became a “structural characteristic” of the Cabo Verdean society (Challinor 2008: 87). Migration became so common that currently, the emigrant population of Cabo Verdeans outnumbers those who remain on the islands (Fyfe 1981; Carreira 1982; Challinor 2008).

Thus, while a native culture was formed on the islands during and after colonial rule, finding expression in different musical forms and in the development of Krioulu, the culture with which Cabo Verdeans identify, this culture is also affected by the experiences of relatives living abroad and the ideas about race which have grown from this situation. For example, many Cabo Verdeans attribute an increase in urban crime to repatriated citizens whose ancestors had migrated to the United States and had encountered violent Black youth culture (Challinor 2008). Unfortunately, views like these, as well as the history of racism prevalent throughout the colonial period, has caused terms of color to become synonymous with socioeconomic status: a well-to-do Cabo Verdean does not want to be called “Black,” though a great majority of Cabo Verdeans have black or brown skin, but considers him/herself more Eurocentric than those too poor to afford this status (Challinor 2008)<sup>4</sup>.

As noted above, Cabo Verdeans had access to Western education far earlier than other Lusophone colonies (Keese 2007). Though universities were established in Cabo Verde after independence, many Cabo Verdeans still choose to study abroad, contributing to the Cabo Verdean diaspora. Portugal provides Cabo Verde with approximately twenty-seven million euros each year to support university education for the citizens, while Brazil offers

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

twenty scholarships annually for Cabo Verdeans to pursue master's or doctoral degrees in Brazil (Resources and Infrastructure 2007). Though primary education is now universal on the islands, and secondary education is going in that direction (Atchoaréna et al. 2008), the literacy level remains below 80%, and only 69.2% of women are literate (CountryWatch Incorporated 2020).

As a demographic group, women are generally at a disadvantage in Cabo Verde. In the island culture, it is common for women to have multiple partners: monogamy and exclusivity are not expected (Challinor 2008). However, many fathers do not accept responsibility for providing for their offspring, which creates a hardship on women (CountryWatch Incorporated 2020). Economically, only 46.9% of females are economically "active," and the estimated annual earned income of women amounts to only \$3,392 (CountryWatch Incorporated 2020). Though women have the right to vote and the right to stand for election, they are underrepresented, undereducated, and to them often falls the burden of raising children and being "exemplary mothers" (CountryWatch Incorporated 2020; Challinor 2017). This was especially the case when it was mostly men who migrated to other countries to find work, leaving the women behind (Challinor 2017). In more recent years, more women have started migrating for education and work opportunities; however, many women still stay behind to care for younger siblings, nieces, and nephews, and the idea of women as caregivers is still prominent (Challinor 2017). Within Cabo Verde's unstable economy, employment opportunities are more limited for women and many face unemployment while trying to support their families (Challinor 2017).

The economy of Cabo Verde, still precarious today, was never stable. Cabo Verde is situated conveniently in the Atlantic between Africa and North and South America, and thus it became a center for the slave trade between the two continents (Fyfe 1981). However, due to cyclical famine during the whaling industry period, which began in the seventeenth century, many Cabo Verdeans found joining whaling ships a way to escape the harsh realities of island life, beginning the pattern of emigration from the islands still found today. Through serving on whaling ships, Cape Verdeans were able to settle in large numbers in the US where their descendants constitute a large Anglophone diasporic community (Fyfe 1981; Challinor 2008). After gaining independence in 1975, the new government of Cabo Verde was left with the problems the Portuguese Empire had been unwilling to solve: a poor agricultural situation, with not enough resources for proper nutrition, the continued prospect of drought and famine and the need to build up a weak economy to take part in the global market (Keese 2008). Though the economy has grown since the late twentieth century, raising the country

to the level of “lower-middle income countries” (Atchoaréna et al 2008: 172), Cabo Verde is still not self-sustaining in terms of food, over 80% of which must be imported (CountryWatch Incorporated 2020). The harsh climatic conditions, unstable economy, dependence on Portugal and Brazil, and the history of emigration have all contributed to the large Cabo Verdean diaspora, affecting not only the island population itself, but also the form libraries and information services take on the island and the services they offer.

As can be seen from the picture painted above, Cabo Verde’s history, culture, and current situation present a unique setting for the development of libraries. Often an issue with libraries in former European colonies is the collection and preservation of information created before the period of colonization, as well as the issue of providing resources in the native language(s) of the country. In Cabo Verde, all information—both oral and written—grew in tandem with the society itself, shifting the focus of libraries’ archival functions. And, though the majority of the island’s inhabitants speak the Krioulu language, *Kabuverdianu*, there is no support for bilingual education, which affects the country’s literacy rates, as those who are literate speak Portuguese as the official language of the nation (Spolsky 2018). Thus, many of those Cabo Verdeans who pursue higher education still do so abroad, using other countries’ information resources (Spolsky 2018; Challinor 2008). In a nation where identity is associated with Eurocentric as well as African roots, the realm of information and higher education has been left to Western culture, and those remaining on the islands to use the libraries may not be in a position to make reading and information digestion a priority in their daily lives. This, combined with the fact that a large percentage of the population is burdened with both familial and economic duties, has affected the development of libraries in Cabo Verde—their creation, the way they are used, and their maintenance. The development and current status of libraries in Cabo Verde is largely dependent on the economic and educational aspects of the country and the priorities given to information access and information literacy by the Cabo Verdean government.

### **The Development of Libraries in Cabo Verde: Economy, Education, and Government Priorities**

The first libraries created in Lusophone Africa were meant for the use of Portuguese officials and not for the community at large (Saunders and Stewart Saunders 1994). The struggles of the nation to survive while under colonial rule did not allow for further development of a library system, so that by 1967, only eight years before declaring

independence, Cabo Verde had only a handful of libraries to serve all nine inhabited islands: two public libraries, one lycée library, and eleven smaller libraries (Saunders and Stewart Saunders 1994).

After independence, the focus of the new government was on sustaining the nation and redressing the problems caused by agrarian and nutritional shortages. In order to grow the economy, Cabo Verde relied heavily on foreign aid, including aid for education. Since for many years the only aid received for education was from Portugal and was meant to allow Cabo Verdeans to study in Portugal, libraries were not seen as being needed on the islands to support education—a primary function of libraries in the West (Challinor 2008). Additionally, as the government's focus was on the economy and not on civic services, no priority was placed on providing a library system for the general public's education or leisure.

Thus, cultural institutions took a back seat until the last decades of the twentieth century, when the country's economy had finally started to grow and the government started to prioritize education. As previously stated, lack of both higher education on the islands and aid from Portugal meant that high-achieving students attained post-secondary degrees abroad and often did not return, creating a “brain drain” for the country in several sectors (Challinor 2008). However, beginning in the 1980s, the Cabo Verdean government started putting more emphasis on literacy and primary education for its citizens (Ramos et al 2011). A reform movement in the 1990s increased the length of primary education from four years to six, which improved enrollment (Atchoaréna et al 2008). A push was then made to increase enrollment in secondary schools and to make secondary education universal (Atchoaréna et al 2008). The government began to give more attention to vocational schools as a method to increase retention rates (Atchoaréna et al 2008). At the same time, the demand for tertiary education on the islands became stronger, and, in 2006, Cabo Verde's first university, the Universidade Pública de Cabo Verde, was opened in Praia (Atchoaréna et al, 2008).

The libraries of Cabo Verde can be seen as having developed in tandem with the education system. The educational reform began in the 1980s, and it was on December 31, 1988 that the National Historical Archive was inaugurated, the first national institution of information in the country (Casa Comum n.d.). With education continuing to be a priority in the 1990s, the country finally opened its national library, the Biblioteca Nacional de Cabo Verde, in 1999 (IBNL 2012). Happily, after the creation of the National Library, the next eight years saw an increase in the number of libraries on the islands. With the opening of the Universidade Pública de Cabo Verde in 2006, the country gained its first academic library (Atchoaréna et al 2008), and soon gained more as other universities opened, due to the fact

that, as Ocholla (2009) explains, many universities were required to have a library for accreditation purposes. By 2007, The International Federation of Library Associations & Institutions (IFLA) (2007) reported Cabo Verde as having reported on thirty public libraries (including the National Library), six university research libraries, ten school libraries, and two other research libraries funded by the government.

That libraries were being seen more as partners in the area of the economy as well as education is shown by the fact that in 2013, the West Africa Institute (WAI), which focuses on regional integration for Africa, placed its research library within Cabo Verde's National Library, adding another institute to the libraries to be found on the islands (West Africa Institute 2012). Additionally, the country's National Assembly has its own library, which is well-equipped with 15,090 bibliographic records and contains many print works, including monographs, periodicals, newspapers, and parliamentary documentation (National Assembly 2018). These two libraries are the best equipped in the country in terms of resources, which aligns with the government's priorities in terms of the economy and becoming a globally competitive nation. To ensure continued prioritization by the government of libraries in general, in 2015, Cabo Verde was one of thirteen African countries to sign the Cape Town declaration, a series of resolutions related to providing resources to develop African libraries, promote policies on access to information, and encourage the ministers of African countries within whose purview libraries fall to meet regularly to discuss the status of their libraries (Eberhart 2015). In less than twenty years, Cabo Verde had gained thirty-four libraries and joined efforts to be part of the larger movement for information freedom and access.

It would seem, from this trajectory, that the Western library system and the discipline of LIS in Cabo Verde were securely established and thriving by the middle of the last decade. Such, however, was not the case. Though, as of 2012, there were around fifty libraries on the islands, very little information is to be found about them, as very few maintain a website. Even the National Library's website has been relegated to the *Wayback Machine*, as it has not been updated since 2012 (IBNL 2012). Additionally, libraries that are fully digitized, such as the digital library created by the Jean Piaget University in an attempt to increase access to resources, and the African Digital Library, which provides access to many databases for researchers all over Africa, have not been maintained (Barreto Da Rosa & Lamas 2012; African Digital Library 2014). The link to Jean Piaget's digital library is broken, calling into question its whole *raison d'être*, and the African Digital Library had been updated in 2014, but its domain expired in 2021 (African Digital Library 2014). While it is unclear why such



important projects would become defunct, both cases imply difficulties with maintenance and a lack of human resources working to ensure continued access to information.

Another indicator of the lack of a human element in the library structure in Cabo Verde is the fact that there is no national library association or code of ethics for librarians to adhere to (IFLA/FAIFE 2007). Thus, there is no national support for the careers and duties of those in charge of libraries. Additionally, the discipline of Library and Information Science, as it is understood in most parts of the world, simply does not exist in Cabo Verde.<sup>5</sup> Anyone who can read and write is qualified for such a position and, as there is very little information to be found about Cabo Verde's libraries in general, there is no information as to what degrees current librarians hold.<sup>6</sup> As there is no LIS discipline in the country, so there is no specialized education for librarians. The only two degrees somewhat related are an undergraduate degree in history which provides training in "Museology, Libraries, and Archives," as well as several other areas, and another undergraduate degree in Cultural Heritage Management, which can train people to manage libraries, along with training in other areas of management (Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Art, 2020b, para. 4; Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Art, 2020a). The lack of a discipline and teaching model for LIS means that there is not a standard way of operating libraries, nor a shared understanding of how to promote library services, advocate for libraries, and expand the library system.

In addition to the lack of a trained human element to maintain library services, whether in a physical or digital space, there is relatively little funding and no direct legislation pertaining to libraries in Cabo Verde. While in theory the National Archive and the municipal (public) libraries are funded by the state, in reality money is scarce.<sup>7</sup> Cabo Verdean libraries thus rely heavily on external aid for funding, which puts their budgets in a consistently precarious position (Barreto Da Rosa and Lamas 2012). Indeed, the National Archive does not currently have the means to buy books.<sup>8</sup> As there is only a small book industry in Cabo Verde, all resources must be imported, and this is quite expensive.<sup>9</sup> Due to the country depending mainly on money from citizens from the EU, the U.S., and China, investing in libraries, even for the benefit of education, is not a priority<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Isabel Ferreira, pers. comm., 16 April 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

In line with the low prioritization of library funding by the government, there seems to be no constitutional law to enforce the support of a public library system in the country. The Cabo Verde Constitution upholds the freedom of thought, expression, and “intellectual, artistic, and cultural creation” (Cape Verde Constitution, pt.2, art. XXVII, sec. 2) as well as the freedom of the press (Cape Verde Constitution, pt.2, art. XLVI, sec. 1). Additionally, the constitution states that one of the tasks of the state is to “foment education, culture, scientific investigation, the dissemination of new technologies, as well as the dissemination of Cape Verdean culture in the world” (Cape Verde Constitution, pt. 1, art. VII, sec. 1h), and declares the right of citizens to have the freedom to “inform and be informed, to search for, receive, and disseminate information” (Cape Verde Constitution, pt. 2, art. XLV, sec. 2). While these rights align with the purpose of libraries as understood in Western terms, there is nothing explicit about establishing and funding libraries in the Constitution, though it does clearly state the support of establishing radio and television stations. This indicates that the government, while acknowledging the need for some support for its country’s information infrastructure, has not prioritized libraries as disseminators of information for its population (Cape Verde Constitution, pt. 2, art. XLV, sec. 9).

The fact that the constitution does support the dissemination of technology and culture, as well as freedom of information, shows that there is a basis for more government support of libraries in Cabo Verde. Recent legislation in related areas indicates that the country is moving in that direction. In 2019, the government of Cabo Verde joined three international treaties covering copyright: the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Copyright Treaty, the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty, and the Marrakesh Treaty (World Intellectual Property Organization 2019). These treaties will increase the rights of creators of content in Cabo Verde, and the Marrakesh Treaty aims to facilitate access to published works for disabled persons (World Intellectual Property Organization 2019). Cabo Verde’s intent is that these treaties will help to protect the historical and cultural materials of the country, including those in the National Library and Cape Verdean Historical Archive (Cape Verde 2019). Whether protecting these materials includes expanding access to them and services surrounding them remains to be seen.

At the present moment, the state of libraries and other information centers in Cabo Verde leaves much to be desired for them to reach their full potential. According to Dr. Isabel Ferreira, born and raised in Portugal but of Cabo Verdean descent, the libraries in Cabo Verde are “generalist, small, and very . . . outdated,” and the academic libraries have

small print collections, outdated and written only in Portuguese.<sup>11</sup> As noted above, importing books is expensive, and, with no national book industry, there are not enough resources in the native language to draw the interest of much of the community (Barreto Da Rosa and Lamas 2012; Lor 2000). Additionally, though there are local archives in the Cabo Verdean municipalities, which hold a great deal of documentation on local social and political issues, these resources have sadly been stored in cellars, not organized or maintained, and left without any inventories).<sup>12</sup>

Though digital libraries are seen to be a solution to the lack of resources, there are issues with access, training, and costs (Barreto da Rosa and Lamas 2012). Dr. Ferreira reports that she assisted the ISCEE (translated as the Higher Institute of Economic and Business Sciences) to connect to international data bases but had to have assistance from a university in Portugal, which ensures the continued Western influence on the library system (Ferreira, pers. comm., 16 April 2020). Nevertheless, Cabo Verde increasingly depends on distance learning and digital resources as solutions to providing education across geographic barriers, and of the higher education institutions which do provide information about their libraries, most still rely heavily on digital resources and online catalogues from other libraries and consider the physical library principally as a space to study and gain internet access (Barreto Da Rosa & Lamas 2012; Ramos et al 2011; Universidade de Mindelo 2017; Higher Institute of Economic and Business Sciences 2014; Universidade de Cabo Verde 2020).

There is, however, a ray of hope for the growth and development of libraries and their prioritization by the government and the people. In 2018, two primary schools opened new libraries as part of the “Dynamization of School Libraries” project, an effort by the governments of both Cabo Verde and Portugal to ensure schools are well-equipped with books in order to assist in the teaching of children (Cape Verde: Achada Leitão and Salineiro elementary schools, 2018, para.1). The emphasis here is not just on sources, but also on physical books and the development of children’s relationship with these books (Cape Verde: Achada Leitão and Salineiro elementary schools, 2018). The project explicitly makes the connection between information access and literacy, and democratization and culture (Cape Verde: Achada Leitão and Salineiro elementary schools, 2018). The focus on helping the young generation, investing in resources other than digital databases, and making connections between libraries and the greater world is a step in the direction of creating a

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<sup>11</sup> Isabel Ferreira, personal communications, 16 April 2020; 7 June 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Keese, pers. comm., 18 April 2020.

cultural atmosphere where information is valued not just as a commodity, but for its service to the quality of life of the people of the nation.

### **Different Realities: A Canvas for Comparative Librarianship**

While LIS researchers understand that context affects the workings of any library system, most comparative librarian researchers approach their subject stationed firmly in their own reality. However, in order to collaborate with a culture, to help develop a library system without forcing changes which will end up inhibiting progress, one must put on a different pair of glasses and step into the reality of the culture under scrutiny. Such was the case for me in trying to discover the state of libraries and LIS in Cabo Verde. When I finally made contact with Dr. Ferreira, I put to her the questions I had compiled from my own understanding of the existence of libraries and LIS in the world: “What are the educational standards for LIS in your country?” “How does the public library system work?” “What funding and legislation deal with the libraries in Cabo Verde?” These were the pieces of information I was aiming to discover, but, in fact, some of that information does not even exist. This is because, as Dr. Ferreira kindly told me, “the basis of your perspective does not correspond to Caboverdean reality” (Ferreira, pers. comm., 16 April 2020).

These words were the switch that turned the light on in my mind and illuminated the fact that there are people who not only live differently from oneself as an individual but have an entirely different perception of reality—of how the world works, how the timeline of one’s life should be organized and what is important in terms of quality of life. This is the case with Cabo Verde, where its Western-style libraries do not work cohesively with the realities of its citizens’ daily lives (Ferreira, pers. comm., 16 April 2020). These libraries were built on the Western model, as the first libraries were meant for the Portuguese colonizers. The modern university libraries have been aided by Western institutions and also try to make use of databases and digital resources in the same way that Western academic libraries do in order to educate citizens to compete in a global capitalist economy dominated by western powers. However, the current state of Cabo Verde’s libraries seems to indicate that the Western model is not the best system for this society (Saunders and Stewart Saunders 1994).

Western libraries are sources of literature and information, but also serve as types of community centers, offering education, information on civic matters, and other programs. These libraries are supported by a methodology behind the running of these institutions, an organizational system, and an educational discipline that provides a highly trained human

element for information services. This system grew out of societies that had much more money and power as well as longer histories of democracy and more self-sustainability, allowing the philosophical importance of information and public service to become priorities.

This is not the reality in Cabo Verde. With a culture born of interactions between master and slave, with no previous indigenous cultural information to protect, Cabo Verde has thus turned to Europe for its information and education. What use would a system such as the one described above be to these citizens? For Cabo Verdeans, the reality of everyday life is that of trying to survive and make a living in a country with a precarious economy and of experiencing a formation of identity associated with the understanding that the “good life” is synonymous with inhabitation elsewhere through migration for work or study. This is not a society where public library use is routine, where civic programs are abundantly available, and information is treasured for its own sake. Much of primary education is rote learning and is not given in the commonly spoken native language (Lor 2000; Spolsky 2018). Additionally, there are very few published materials in Krioulu, so the culture is not supported in this way (IFLA/FAIFE 2007). Higher education available in the home country is only fourteen years old, and the institutions are not well-staffed or supported, so many Cabo Verdeans continue to consider Europe or the United States as the location of knowledge resources (Ferreira, pers. comm., 16 April 2020; Challinor 2008). Both education and information are seen as a means to an end—a job, money, survival—and too often this also involves emigration. The success of a library system depends on its ability to work symbiotically with the realities of its society, and the western model of libraries and LIS simply does not fit into the structure of Cabo Verde’s reality and what its people require to have a fulfilling life.

Cabo Verde thus becomes a canvas for creating a new library system and a new way of practicing LIS. The point of a library is to serve each individual in a community, to meet her/his/their information needs, and support her/his/their intellectual freedom. However, as Lor (2000) points out, we must first think of the composition of the potential users of a library and their information needs. Once again, one must step into Cabo Verdean reality to understand where to start in meeting these needs. In the reality of Cabo Verde, the Western library model does not meet the information needs of the society: while many Cabo Verdeans enjoy reading, public libraries are not a main source for this material: books are found in private home libraries, exchanged with friends, and often purchased from abroad (Ferreira, pers. comm., 7 June 2020). The recent emphasis on early childhood literacy does seem to

align more with the Western idea of school libraries, but, again, school libraries as the west sees them have not been created and may not necessarily be needed to provide the physical access to books the government is intent upon. Perhaps the Western idea of a library is not what is needed at all, but rather, a type of information center, one that meets the needs of both the literate and illiterate members of the community (Hussey 2020: 11:31; Lor 2000). The discipline of LIS should also, then, be reworked to be the science behind the running of these information centers and the training of those who become the “librarians” in this society: not—at least immediately, however, it is important—a whole discipline complete with full curricula and standard systems to learn. Rather, LIS in Cabo Verde will need to develop organically alongside educational institutions and what they offer: It must constantly observe and evaluate the needs of its communities, compare these with the resources available (both from the government and from education centers), and adapt to create systems that provide maximum service to citizens in terms of access to information.

Before any organization, librarian from another country, or other foreign entity suggests or tries to implement “improvements” to Cabo Verde’s system, they need to take a step back and absorb the culture, its needs, its priorities, and its way of addressing both the latter and the former. While this paper is by no means a comprehensive dive into Cabo Verdean culture, the information provided within it presents some ideas as to what types of services and information behaviors could benefit the society. First, every level of education and general literacy needs to be supported. The recent project of the “Dynamization of School Libraries” is a step toward reforming the way libraries work in tandem with education because it focuses on the actual needs of the children and the fact that they have a working relationship with information (Cape Verde: Achada Leito and Salineiro elementary schools, 2018, para.1). But this kind of support is not limited to school libraries: other information centers can also offer this kind of support as well as many other services. For example, creating a space and system for organizing those municipal archives which currently have no home would be a significant contribution to each community’s understanding of itself, past and present. Second, offering information services for mothers, who are juggling child-rearing and career duties, as well as often being the only parent actively participating in school meetings and other community groups, can encourage and extend their self-reliance and ability to support their families through independent endeavors, such as selling handicrafts (Challinor 2017). Extending government funding to public libraries to provide additional pleasure reading material can broaden the dissemination of these resources, reaching more of the population. Finally, creating a space that celebrates the Krioulu culture, which will

display the artifacts available and encourage other types of information dissemination, such as performance and storytelling, can create a sense of cohesiveness in communities and a sense of ownership of one's own information. As Lor (2000) says, building from the ground up and starting with the idea that a library is community-owned is an alternative way to revitalize the library system and keep people invested in its maintenance and use. It is vital to remember, however, that there will always be many alternatives, and no one person, group, or organization can decide conclusively which is the best for a whole society.

## Conclusions

Cabo Verde is a unique case for the practice of comparative librarianship and the realization of the fact that there can be many working models of librarianship throughout the world. Cases are rare where an existing culture has nothing to return to after decolonization, while it does not wish to be (and possibly, at this time, cannot be) assimilated into Western modes. Without the added concerns of preserving an indigenous history, rebuilding an entire culture post-colonization, and being divided by several languages, Cabo Verde offers a chance to experiment with new library systems while at the same time supporting the growth of education in the country and helping to empower its citizens. Trying to impose the western library model on this culture without the infrastructure to support it does not promote access to information. For those in the information and education fields in Cabo Verde, working with the local communities to understand what services and education they need and creating dedicated spaces to supply these seems to be a much more viable way of increasing an LIS presence in the country. How information centers develop on these islands over time will be important for researchers of comparative librarianship to watch, but one thing is clear: if successful library systems depend on understanding a culture's reality, then Cabo Verde's library (or information center) system must be built by its own people. Only in this way can the system that emerges truly serve the information needs of this unique culture and help it to flourish in the information age.

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<sup>13</sup>The MENA reports for 2018 and 2019 are no longer generally available on the internet. They were accessed through the library of Simmons University, Boston, MA.



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### **Bionote/Nota Biográfica**

MARILLA MACGREGOR received her BA in English from Gustavus Adolphus College in 2013, and is completing an MA in Children’s Literature at Hollins University. She received her MS in Library and Information Science from Simmons University in 2020, where she focused on academic librarianship. Her dissertation was on information services in Cabo Verde. Her research interests include comparative librarianship, intellectual freedom, and mis/disinformation in the digital age.

MARILLA MACGREGOR é bacharel em Língua Inglesa pelo Gustavus Adolphus College (2013) e encontra-se a finalizar o mestrado em literatura infantil na Hollins University. Concluiu o mestrado em Biblioteconomia e Ciência da Informação pela Simmons University em 2020, onde se focou na biblioteconomia acadêmica. A sua dissertação tratava-se dos serviços de informação em Cabo Verde. Os seus interesses atuais em termos de investigação incluem a biblioteconomia comparativa, a liberdade intelectual e a des/informação na era digital.