

# The Birth of Angola

In the 16th century Portugal had one of the biggest colonial empires of the world, but it lacked people to actually colonize it. In the Brazilian colony the Portuguese, like many European colonists, opted to use slavery to supply this shortage of workers. Colonists tried to enslave Brazilian natives in the beginning, but this quickly proved too difficult for many reasons, including the familiarity natives had with the land. The solution was importing slaves from Africa. [1]

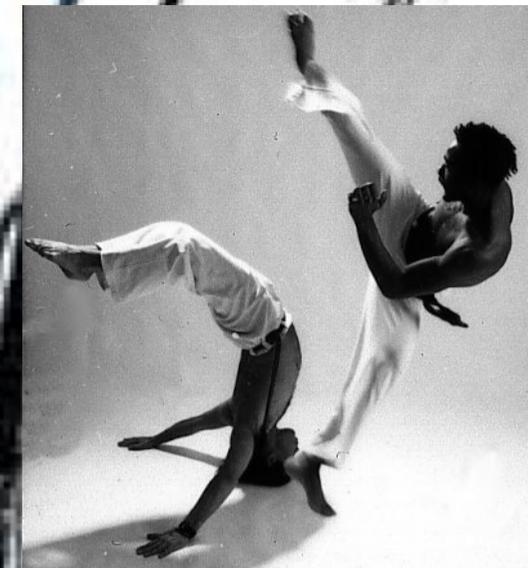
In its first century the main economic activity in the colony was the production and processing of sugarcane. Portuguese colonists used to create large sugarcane farms called engenhos, farms which extensively used enslaved workers. Slaves, living in inhumane and humiliating conditions, were forced to work hard and often suffered physical punishment for any small misbehaviour. [1] Even though slaves outnumbered the Portuguese colonists, the lack of weapons, the colonial law, the disagreement between slaves coming from different African cultures and their complete lack of knowledge about the land and its surroundings would usually discourage the idea of a rebellion.

In this environment Capoeira began to develop. More than a fighting style, it was

created as a hope of survival, a tool with which an escaped slave, completely unequipped, could survive in the hostile, unknown land and face the hunt of the capitães-do-mato, colonial agents armed and mounted in charge of finding escapees.

Soon several groups of African slaves would gather and establish Quilombos, primitive settlements in far and hard to reach places. After its humble start, some quilombos would develop, attracting more runaway slaves, Brazilian natives and even Europeans escaping the law or catholic extremism. Sometimes a quilombo would become a real independent multi-ethnic state.[2]

Everyday life in a quilombo would offer freedom and the opportunity to rescue traditional cultures lost due to colonial



oppression.[2] In this kind of multi-ethnic community, constantly threatened by Portuguese colonial troops, Capoeira evolved from a survival tool to a martial art focused on war.

The biggest of the quilombos, the Quilombo dos Palmares, consisted of many villages mostly of African slaves though they also consisted of other ethnicities and lasted for more than a century, resisting, often outnumbered, many colonial attacks. This quilombo resisted at least 24 small attacks and 18 great colonial invasions. Portuguese soldiers sometimes stated it took more than one dragoon to capture a quilombo warrior, since they would defend themselves with a strangely moving fighting technique. The governor from that province declared "it is harder to defeat a quilombo than the Dutch invaders." [2]