
Dandara of Palmares

(?-1694),

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a warrior who, along with her husband Zumbi, helped to defend Palmares, a famed Maroon community (*quilombo*) established in the late sixteenth century in the northeastern Brazilian captaincy of Alagoas. While many scholars have estimated that Palmares was home to up to 20,000 inhabitants, James Lockhart and Stuart Schwartz (1983) question such a high figure, which would have made Palmares the largest city in colonial Brazil. Nonetheless, Palmares is generally regarded as the largest and longest-lived fugitive community in Brazil. Today, Zumbi and Dandara maintain symbolic importance as Afro-Brazilians continue to struggle for racial and social equality.

While there are no public records of Dandara's exact place or date of birth, her full name, or her parents' names, sources say that she was most likely born in Brazil and moved to Palmares as a girl. Palmares was not a single community, but rather several *mocambos* (village-sized communities) united to form a neo-African kingdom. Some inhabitants of Palmares were from Africa, including West Central regions such as Angola. Others were Brazilian born. Palmares welcomed not only formerly enslaved blacks, but also indigenous people, mulattos, and some whites. Palmares became economically self-sufficient by diversifying agricultural production of crops such as corn, beans, manioc, potatoes, and sugarcane. The existence and strength of Palmares as an economically self-sufficient community was a threat to the system of slavery in colonial Brazil. Palmares was subject to frequent military attacks between 1672 and 1694. The *quilombo* resisted incursions from both the Dutch and the Portuguese, maintaining its existence for nearly a century.

In 1678, Ganga Zumba, then the leader of Palmares, accepted a peace treaty offered by the Portuguese governor of Pernambuco. This treaty required the people of Palmares to relocate to the Cucaú Valley. The agreement has received only secondary attention by historians, and is usually seen as a betrayal. Although Dandara had once fought alongside Ganga Zumba, she opposed the terms of the treaty, fearing that moving to the Cucaú Valley would lead to the destruction of the Republic of Palmares and a return to slavery. She most likely convinced Zumbi, her husband and Ganga Zumba's nephew, to oppose the treaty as well. Zumbi challenged Ganga Zumba and led a revolt opposing any concessions to colonial authorities, which created a division within Palmares. Soon after, Zumbi succeeded Ganga Zumba as the leader of Palmares.

Following his feature-length motion picture *Ganga Zumba* (1963), the director Carlos Diegues's *Quilombo* (1984) spans the period from 1650 to 1695. Dandara, played by Afro-Brazilian actress Zezé Motta (1944–), is depicted as Zumbi's general, confidante, and female alter ego. She is likened to the *orixá* (Orisha) Iansã, a deity who is known as a fierce warrior associated with the winds, storms, and change. In fact, in the film it is Dandara's performance of religious rituals that saves Ganga Zumba's

life. However, Robert Stam (1997) points out that while Diegues was attempting to valorize black culture by associating each character with a particular *orixá*, these associations are historically inaccurate. Given the makeup of the enslaved population, which came mostly from Angola at the time, Bantu culture was prevalent in Palmares—not Yoruba culture, as the film suggests.

There is inconsistency in the scholarly literature regarding the circumstances of Dandara's death. Some sources say that she was killed on 6 February 1694 with other residents of Palmares when Cerca Real dos Macacos was destroyed. Other sources contend that after Palmares fell, Dandara jumped off the highest mountain peak of the *quilombo*, preferring suicide to a return to enslavement. In 1978, the date of Zumbi's death (November 20) was instituted as the National Day of Black Consciousness (Dia Nacional da Consciência Negra) in Brazil. Ultimately, *quilombolas* like Zumbi and Dandara have come to symbolize a tradition of black resistance in Brazil.

[See also Ganga Zumba; Motta, Zezé; and Zumbi dos Palmares.]

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See also

Ganga Zumba <<https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-73995>>

Motta, Zezé <[https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/
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