

**Introduction:** This factsheet is not intended to be definitive guide to the Candomblé religion. Alternatively, it attempts to provide basic known facts as well as some information that is perhaps less well-known.

## Candomblé



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A religion based on African beliefs. There are approximately 2 million followers throughout the world. It is particularly popular in Brazil and surrounding countries.

### **Numbers in the UK**

Not known.

### **Beliefs**

Candomblé is a syncretic religion, i.e. it includes elements of other faiths. In the case of Candomblé, many traditional Central and Western African religions such as Yoruba, Fon and Bantu, have combined with elements/remnants of Roman Catholicism. Candomblé followers have a special affinity to Catholicism, based on historic ties. However, a strong 'africanisation' of Candomblé has taken place over the last thirty years, consciously removing Catholic influences.

Candomblé nagô followers seek harmony with natural surroundings. They believe in one God or exalted being called Oludumaré, who is all-powerful and whose energy emanates through deities known as 'orixas'<sup>2</sup>. Such deities exist in an annual cycle and are said to resemble specific human attributes. Such a cycle has parallels with the Catholic liturgy. The 'orixas' also feature in personal development, in that it is believed that every person has such a deity for protection and to shape and influence one's ultimate destiny. Notions of good and bad are not as relevant as morality and an individual's duty to fulfil a personal destiny, as laid out during divination with the cowry shells.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Use of this photo is by kind permission of Roderick Steel and is only for use by Leicestershire County Council. The photo must not be published on the internet or in books or magazines etc.

<sup>2</sup> People who worship 'voduns' call the exalted being 'mawu-lissa' and 'inkices' call him 'zambi'.

<sup>3</sup> See 'Worship' section.

## History

Candomblé translates as 'dance in honour of the Gods'. The African elements of the faith were brought to Brazil through the Slave Trade and the strong essence and character of these links has been retained, most notably through the dancing that is a fundamental part of worship. The first official temple of the faith was founded in Salvador da Bahia in Brazil at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

## Worship

Religious centres (known as 'terreiros') provide the organisational focus for the Candomblé faith. They are led by high priests and priestesses, who regularly read the believer's fortune by casting cowry shells and interpreting the final position and pattern of their fall.

Music, drumming and dancing are key elements of Candomblé worship. Drumming and ritual singing, preceded by libations and offerings, call the deities down to possess those involved (the initiates). The dances of the deities hark back to mythical stories and passages. Each deity wears clothes that allude to a mythological event, though the details of these clothes vary enormously from temple to temple. The initiates all wear similar clothes, but they do wear beaded necklaces with specific colours for individual deities. When the initiates go into a trance, they are dressed in specific clothing (as depicted in the picture on the previous page).

Candomblé survived through oral transmission but nowadays there are hundreds of publications, both academic and popular, that teach people the workings of the religion.

## Persecution

The Candomblé faith was condemned by the Catholic Church in Brazil and followers were subject to discrimination and persecution through Government campaigns and police action. Discrimination against the religion has increased with the advent of some televised evangelism that condemned the religion. Candomblé won an important battle in the Brazilian Supreme Court in 2005 in relation to this, but the court's decision has yet to be carried out.

## Leicestershire Contacts

None known. Contact the Leicester or Loughborough Council of Faiths or the St Philip's Centre.<sup>4</sup>

## Credits and Sources of Further Information

Ama, A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade ([www.ama.africatoday.com/candomble.htm](http://www.ama.africatoday.com/candomble.htm))

BBC – Religion and Ethics ([www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/candomble/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/candomble/))

Brazilian Government ([www.mre.gov.br/cdbrasil/itamaraty/web/ingles/artecult/religiao/candombl/](http://www.mre.gov.br/cdbrasil/itamaraty/web/ingles/artecult/religiao/candombl/))

Candomblé in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil ([www.bahia-online.net/Candomble.htm](http://www.bahia-online.net/Candomble.htm))

Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candombl%C3%A9>)

Particular thanks to Rod Steel for looking over a draft copy of this factsheet and making some suggested changes. Rod, who lives in São Paulo, Brazil, was initiated into Candomblé in 1999.

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<sup>4</sup> Contact Julian Harrison at Leicestershire County Council for further information.