

Inventing an African Alphabet

In 1978, Congolese inventor David Wabeladio Payi (1957–2013) proposed a new writing system, called Mandombe. Since then, Mandombe has grown and now has thousands of learners, not only in the Democratic Republic of Congo but also in France, Angola, and many other countries. Drawing upon Ramon Sarró's personal friendship with Wabeladio, this book tells the story of Wabeladio, his alphabet, and the creativity that both continue to inspire. A member of the Kimbanguist church, which began as an anti-colonial movement in 1921, Wabeladio was deeply influenced by spirituality and Kongo culture, as was his script. Combining biography, art, and religion, Sarró explores a range of ideas, from the role of pilgrimage and landscape in Wabeladio's life to the intricacies and logic of Mandombe. Sarró situates the creative individual within a rich context of anthropological, historical, and philosophical scholarship, offering a new perspective on the relationships between imagination, innovation, and revelation.

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Inventing an African Alphabet

Writing, Art, and Kongo Culture in the DRC

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To Eugénie Dinkembi Dimbueni and her and
Wabeladio's five daughters:
Vumi Wanzambi Bénédicte
Mayoka Masingama Gradie
Lombo Vidila Davina
Fwala Diakubikua Christelle
Luvuvuamu Mbonga Élisée

Frantz Fanon stated that Africa is shaped like a gun and the DRC is the trigger.

Wabeladio has just pulled that trigger with the invention of Mandombe.

Anonymous text published in the journal *Mpata Natu* (Kinshasa),
31 December 2011, as a commentary on the ceremony that nominated
Wabeladio Payi *Doctor Honoris Causa* at the University of Kinshasa

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¹ Simon Malueki Matuasilua, personal communication, Kinshasa, 2013.

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