

Transcript—DW News: “Fashion Against Forgetting”

<https://www.dw.com/en/fashion-against-forgetting/video-45475671>

Narrator [00:00:02] Embellished skirts, bright colors and the iconic three point hat. These are the trademarks of McBright Kavari’s work. In a world of fashion where African patterns are becoming increasingly popular, the 25 year old Namibian embraces the Victorian heritage that once came from Europe to Namibia.

Kavari [00:00:21] It tells us who we are. It tells us more about where we came from, who we represent. It makes us be who we are individually.

Narrator [00:00:31] The 25 year old Namibian embraces the Victorian heritage that once came from Europe to Namibia. For Kavari, this dress is, however, much more than just a fashion statement. Cavalli’s fashion is in trend. His modern Herero dresses have traveled to catwalks across the continent and Europe. Originally, German missionaries ordered Herero to wear Victorian dresses. The animal-hunting people appropriated this dress code in their own way and added special features such as colorfully printed fabrics and the headgear resembling the horns of a cattle. This way, the Herero turned humiliation into a triumph. Kavari continues this tradition with a modern twist.

Kavari [00:01:16] I always say, especially when I get criticism regarding my designs, I would say, what makes a Herero dress be a Herero dress is basically the headgear, that is that garments. Otherwise, one can play around with it. Have it short. Heavy, sleeveless, heavy. Either way, you went to.

Narrator [00:01:34] His fashion shows regularly spark heated debates on whether his gowns are too revealing and therefore an insult to the sensitive history of the Herero. Many young people, like these models, however, enjoy Cavalli’s take on the dress.

Kasuko Zakaapi [00:01:47] They’re beautiful. Like wherever you go, everybody would just be like, Oh, you look beautiful on it. You know, I love fashion. So you go to a wedding, you would want to wear the latest and all that. Yeah, it’s very beautiful. That’s why I love it.

Narrator [00:02:03] For the Herero, the historical attire is an important element of their commemorative culture. Every year in the town of Okahandja, the Herero pay tribute to their ancestors. Tens of thousands were massacred by German colonial troops in what came to be known as the first genocide of the 20th century. As a sign of bravery, real warriors defending their people took over the uniforms of the killed Germans. Today, these former German robes help young Herero to relate to the history of their people and honor the ancestors.

Multiple Speakers [00:02:44] I feel at peace when I’m in this in it. We we feel proud about ourselves. It shows that you are Herero, apart from everybody. You just put yourself out there. I like showing respect to my ancestors. And I feel like I was there, once, fighting with them to get freedom.

Narrator [00:03:05] Kavari grew up in Windhoek. From a young age, he was fascinated with the traditional attire. Kavari made his first designs at the age of 13 when his mother bought him a sewing machine. At 16, he had his first major fashion show in Berlin featuring the Herero dress. Being a man, however, is sometimes difficult, especially at the beginning of his career. Some family members and friends mocked him for doing what they perceived as women’s work.

Kavari [00:03:34] It's not easy. You get criticism. You get people talking to tell, oh I never knew not, you know, you're not women but some guy or you. But now that I came to realize in my people the culture that the Herero's, they somehow appreciate what I do.

Narrator [00:03:58] One of his uncles refused to talk to Kavari for years, but with success there was acceptance. And today he's seen as a role model for many. As a designer, Kavari wants to reach, above all the young generation. He hopes that these designs can help young Hereros to be proud of who they are and where they come from.

Kavari [00:04:18] I know it's so difficult to accept the change. After every fashion show, you'll get comment, people criticizing and trying to, you know, punch you for what you have done on the dress. But after all, it's it's, I know that change is not easy, but after all, the change also makes the young people get to fall in love with the dress and just carry on wearing and loving traditional attire.

Narrator [00:04:47] While the Herero dress stands for tradition and identity, it also shows that African-izing fashion is not reserved for Western designers who are increasingly making use of ethnic African patterns. The ensemble of traditional European and African elements in Kavari's work is proudly turning the tables.