

## They hire me because I'm exotic

She started out at 14 and has just kept going. It's the thrill of the cameras and spotlights. But Dayan Kodua is moving on from sleek fashion show catwalks. She's striding out into the world of talking pictures.

Dayan Kodua stands out from across the Berlin square, elegantly dressed in a smart city suit and matching light-brown proletarian cap that is seeing a revival in women's fashion these days. Prompt to the very second. She looks the perfect modern career woman. No flashy accessories. Just a bag the size of a small notebook.

A few days later another smiling Dayan keeps a follow-up interview appointment. A few minutes ahead of time, she snatches a break for an apple. In denim. Her long legs clad in designer jeans ribbed with tiny, gleaming silver studs. Young, sexy, on the other side of her 24 years.

Twelve years ago, the Kodua family arrived in the north German city of Kiel from Ghana. The teenager Dayan was spotted pretty soon. "She's a cutie!" Dayan recalls a friend of the family saying. "I'd like her for my next fashion show." It was the beginning of her modelling career. "I was on stage," she recalls, "I said: 'Wow! I like the cameras!' After my first show, they said I had to do a model school. I went to my family and said, 'I have to do this model school and it costs 400 euros, 800 marks, what am I going to do?'" The answer? "Girl, stop getting crazy!"

"I am a bit crazy with my sister and family," Dayan bursts out with a rebellious laugh. "And when I said 'I am going to do this', my parents were, 'No, you will not!'"

Dayan is a fighter. Even way back then at the age of 14. She borrowed the money for the modelling school so she could trip the catwalk again. That was an early lesson in Germany's lust for certificates. "Yes, I made some money, paid the money back. It went on. I was booked for a CD cover and TV spot. And after that, I was doing runaways, catwalks. I still do a lot of catwalks because in Germany, nobody would book me for a Nivea advertisement, or for chocolate or anything."

Dayan, who is a graduate of the Ravensberg Business School, thinks German advertisers have no interest in selling to the Black community – though no one can do this better than a Black model. "They are hiring



There is a shortage of roles for Black actors in Germany

me because I am exotic most of the times. I am like a little mango for them. But I don't feel like a mango!" There's a mathematical rule for the number of Blacks stomping down the German fashion catwalks. "You have something like 20 Whites, and two or three Blacks."



Germany is where she wants to carve out a career

Divide this by two, to get the right number in hard-stricken 2003.

Three years ago, before the big budget cuts, Dayan started looking beyond the days of the sleek catwalks. A second career – but still before the cameras. "Acting is something cool. In modelling, I have a lot of competition. This catwalk stuff!" she hoots. "I don't like the way they treat you. It's like you are a walking clotheshorse. Too superficial. It's all about jealousy....It's like a fight, it's like tiger and cat. I don't like it very much." The absolutely top models like Naomi Campbell make 20,000 or 25,000 dollars a show.

Dayan has worked for some of the glittering names in Haute Couture – Thierry Mugler, Escada and the 'Queen of Punk', the flamboyant Vivienne Westwood. Her good looks also won her Miss Schleswig-Holstein 2002 title and she was fifth in Miss Germany 2002.

Every step that Dayan takes these days, every call, catwalk and cutting session is to take her towards her acting goal. She has to

**"When I said 'I am going to do this' my parents were 'No you will not'"**

pay for coaching, promotional photos, home-page and demo video. "Work, work, work. It's always how are you going to pay for this stuff?" she says without rancour. The biggest cost of all is private acting classes. She has two private lessons a week. Dayan seems bemused when asked to tot it all up. The classes come before everything. "I think it's very, very important because I am going to get everything back one time."

Voice coaching is particularly important. At home, the family speak a mixture of three languages – Asante Twi, English and German. "I still have this English accent," she says with an unmistakable American accent. "Pure, pure German", is her goal. Germany is where she aims to carve out an acting career.

But isn't there a shortage of roles for Blacks in Germany? "The directors had to think each time as to where they could fit a Black face," she agrees. "I've had some castings and I wasn't taken because I'm Black. For movies and sometimes, for fashion. That really pisses me off! I can play the lady who lives in Bavaria, who has a house and who is

married, very normal roles. But they all try to put the Black people in these clichéd roles... I don't want them to see me as a dark-skinned actress."

She's had a lucky break recently. Some months ago, a friend tipped her off that the Greek director, Jorgo Papavassiliou, was casting for his film 'Megalodon'. She called him. "Too late for the castings, but let's meet", was his response. She showed him her work in a cafe. It worked like a charm. He gave her a small part and she had just returned from Spain for the filming. "Jorgo's a very, very great guy" she enthuses. "I was like, thank you so much. People want you to be in 20 movies before they give you a chance...but how can you be a star if no one helps you? It's a very good start. It's a big thing for me now." The film will be shown on the German RTL channel next year.

And the future? "It's very, very hard stuff. I have to work very hard on myself. I have to be perfect. I think if there is time, they are going to take me for any role. I think it's going to be better. I don't want to lose hope. I don't want to sit there and tell myself it's not going to happen; I know it is going to happen!"

**Petar Hadji-Ristic**



"I have to work hard on my self"

### Dayan's vital statistics

**1978:** Born, Accra, Ghana

**1991:** Family settles in Kiel, Germany

**1993:** First modelling show in Kiel

**2001:** Graduates from Ravensberg Business School

**2001 (August):** Moves to Berlin to study acting

**2002:** Roles in ARD and SAT1 movies; Miss Schleswig-Holstein and 5<sup>th</sup> place Miss Germany

**2003:** Role in 'Megalodon', directed by Jorgo Papavassiliou to be shown on the German RTL channel in 2004

Visit her on: [www.dayan-k.de](http://www.dayan-k.de)