

# In a fascinating new biography, LORD ASHCROFT charts the rise of the girl from Nigeria tipped as a possible Tory leader

**L**EFTY Sussex University is where Kemi Badenoch got a taste for the politics that would inspire her to become a Tory MP, a Cabinet minister and now a contender for the leadership of the Conservative Party.

She was radicalised by the ideologically driven militants of the Marxist-Leninists who dominated campus culture — but in completely the opposite direction. She reacted against what she later described as ‘the spoiled, entitled, privileged metropolitan elite-in-training’ she first came across there.

That early contempt for those ignorant armchair activists who spouted Left-wing nonsense while having no knowledge of the real world would remain with her and influence her politics.

She was at Sussex from 1999 to 2003 taking a computer science degree and was too wrapped up in her studies to actually get involved in the maelstrom of student politics. But what happened on campus made a huge impact on her, as her then boyfriend, fellow student Nkem Ifejika (of Nigerian descent like her), recalled.

‘For political reasons, Left-wing students were pressing for a ban on Coca-Cola and on the Daily Mail. She thought they were middle class and spoiled and didn’t understand the real world.’

In particular they didn’t understand Africa, where she had grown up, yet they were also campaigning to boycott products made by the food and beverage company Nestle, on the grounds that it allegedly gave mothers in Africa free baby formula in the hope that, when they stopped breast-feeding, they would choose to buy its baby milk formula instead.

Kemi was furious. ‘She found it so patronising,’ says Ifejika. ‘Judging by the way they behaved, those kids at Sussex thought they were more African than the Africans.’

She was a pragmatist. ‘Having parents who were doctors,’ Kemi said in an interview, ‘I knew that when women are malnourished, formula milk might be a better alternative, and mothers with Aids [which reached epidemic proportions in parts of the continent] can’t breastfeed at all.’

‘These stupid Lefty white kids didn’t know what they were talking about.’

‘I was disturbed by attitudes that didn’t allow Africans and black people agency. It’s something that has stayed with me. I’m very suspicious of people who claim to be wanting to help black people and Africans but really are just virtue-signalling.’

KEMI was born in 1980 in a private maternity hospital in Wimbledon, south-west London, after her Nigerian parents — father Femi Adegoke and mother Feyi — were given what she describes as ‘an obstetric referral’ to a Harley Street doctor after difficulties conceiving.

In December 1979 they returned to the UK for their baby to be born in what they considered to be the best medical environment money could buy.

Their decision to go to Britain for the birth was not unusual among reasonably well-off families in Nigeria but would prove highly significant. For even though the couple and their newborn went straight back home to Lagos, where Kemi would be brought up, she had acquired a legal right to UK citizenship by virtue of having been born on British soil.

Ultimately, this cleared the path

for her return to London as a teenager in the 1990s, to make a life for herself in this country.

Her English-speaking parents belonged to the Yoruba people, a West African ethnic group that makes up about a fifth of the population of Nigeria. Her father was a doctor with a thriving private clinic, her mother a professor of medical physiology. They were middle class and comfortably off.

But Nigeria was a volatile place, ricocheting from one coup to the next, resulting in three decades of military juntas in power.

Economic and political flux and corruption in government and the civil service were endemic. The threat of violence hummed menacingly in the background. In

her maiden speech in the House of Commons in 2017, Kemi spoke of ‘living without electricity and doing my homework by candlelight because the state electricity board could not provide power, and fetching water in heavy, rusty buckets from a borehole a mile away because the nationalised water company could not get water out of the taps’.

By 1995, Nigeria was considered a pariah state and was suspended from the Commonwealth for human rights abuses. Kemi’s parents, once prosperous but now living in reduced circumstances, began making plans to remove their eldest daughter from the turmoil to live abroad.

‘Anyone who had the chance to

get out of Nigeria left,’ says Feyi Fawehinmi, a distant cousin.

Lawlessness — with ‘jungle justice’ common when someone caught stealing risked being doused in petrol and set on fire by a vigilante mob — hastened many people’s departure.

The 16-year-old Kemi achieved high enough marks to win a partial scholarship to study medicine at Stanford University in California. But her parents couldn’t afford to send her to America and decided instead to take advantage of the fact that she had been born in London.

‘Dad spent several months’ pay on my plane ticket,’ she recalled in a 2017 Daily Mail interview. ‘We went to the travel agent with all

his savings stuffed in a plastic carrier bag. He had £100 left when he’d paid for my ticket, and he gave it to me to take to England. So that’s all I had when I arrived.’ She lived in the Wimbledon home of Dr Abiola Tilley Gyado, a long-standing friend of her parents who Kemi referred to as her ‘aunt’, even though they were not actually related. She went to nearby Phoenix College, a state-funded sixth-form college, where she studied for A-levels in biology, chemistry and maths.

It was not at the top of the tree academically and Kemi had difficulty acclimatising to its looser ethos compared with the strict education she had known in Nigeria. She was struck by how

foul-mouthed some of her fellow students were.

‘We were raised as strict Christians and I’d never used the F-word. I found it shocking that young people spoke rudely to adults. This was an area of London with a large black population, yet it was a black culture I didn’t recognise.’

‘A lot of damage has been done by accepting this kind of behaviour as the inevitable corollary of deprivation and poverty.’

She believed some staff at the school treated black students differently. When she expressed an interest in applying for Oxford — the only British university she had heard of on arriving in London — to study medicine, she was steered away from this.

She explained that her parents were doctors, but was asked: ‘Have you considered nursing?’

As for Oxford, she was told there was no point in applying ‘because you won’t get in’. So she didn’t try, conniving in the culture of low expectation, something she would later regret.

She did drop her ambition to become a doctor and switched to computing as a career choice. She had begun to learn computer cod-

ing at a very young age and had always enjoyed problem-solving.

She seems to have been an earnest adolescent whose principal focus was her academic work. But it cannot have been easy to have left her family behind in a troubled country while she enjoyed a more comfortable life in London. This chapter of her life seems to have inspired some deep thinking on her part.

The generally favourable circumstances she encountered have surely informed her politics and her love for Britain. In one interview with the Daily Mail, Kemi said she thought it was ‘a very special privilege to be a citizen of this country. Its values make it special’.

When her A-level results came through, they were disappointing — two Bs and a D. She did not get into Warwick, her chosen university, but her grades were good enough for her second choice, Sussex, to study computer systems engineering.

By the age of 18, Kemi had begun to establish herself in her adopted country. Yet she retained the ability to view things through the eyes of an outsider, a characteristic extremely useful when it comes to confronting awkward truths and

finding solutions to problems. AFTER graduating in 2003, Kemi worked as a software engineer at IT services company Logica. She had, as we saw earlier, challenged the Lefty do-gooders who dominated campus politics but

now she took aim at a much bigger fish when in 2005 the singer and political activist Bob Geldof announced a follow-up to his ground-breaking 1985 Live Aid charity concert.

Live 8, a series of free rock concerts across the world, was

intended to put pressure on the G8 group of nations to do something to address world poverty. The likes of Coldplay, Paul McCartney, Elton John, Madonna, U2, Stevie Wonder and Pink Floyd agreed to play.

Yet amid the excitement, some began to pick holes in Geldof’s idea. BBC broadcaster Andy Kershaw wondered whether it was ‘as much to do with Geldof showing off his ability to push around presidents and prime ministers as with pointing out the potential of Africa. Geldof appears not to be interested in Africa’s strengths, only in an Africa on its knees.’

A campaign group decried the line-up that would be playing at Hyde Park as ‘hideously white’ because only one of the 22 performers, Mariah Carey, was from an ethnic minority background.

Senegalese singer Baaba Maal said: ‘I feel it’s very patronising as an African artist that more of us aren’t involved.’

Kemi couldn’t have agreed more, outraged that wealthy Western musicians like Geldof had condescendingly taken it upon themselves to speak on behalf of Africans in order to tell world leaders what Africa needed.

She was outraged, too, that many of the black musicians who had been brought in at the last minute to deflect the criticism had been relegated to a separate concert at the Eden Project in Cornwall instead of being able to perform alongside the principal bands and singers in London.

Convinced that African people had been forced to assume second-class status in every aspect of Live 8, she decided to go into politics. Aged 25, she joined the party with which she felt most naturally aligned: the Conservatives.

Before she signed up, a black friend warned her that, in his opinion, the Conservative Party was both racist and elitist. Yet by casting these aspersions, he reminded her of that teacher at school who had put her off trying for Oxford on the same grounds — that it was not an institution for people like her. She decided to find out the truth for herself.

Within a few months of becoming a party member, she was invited to a reception in London organised by the youth wing, where she met the then party chairman, Francis Maude. One of his tasks was to make the party more diverse. He encouraged her to go on the candidates list to stand for Parliament. Kemi was on her way.

She was offered a role on a new policy group considering the issue of international aid. When it presented its report at Oxford town hall — introduced by party leader David Cameron — a sandal-wearing, middle-aged white woman in the audience challenged him that as a white man from a privileged background he could not possibly understand the plight of the poor in Africa or of how best to tackle Africa’s debt problems.

Kemi went to speak to her afterwards, introducing herself as a member of the Conservative Party. The woman stared back in disbelief

and then lambasted her for being a Tory, before suggesting that she was too wealthy and too immature to understand the world.

Kemi hit back, accusing the woman of not really being interested in helping black people but rather using them as a weapon to fight her own cause, at which point the woman slapped her face and ran off. Kemi gave chase.

‘I caught her by the hair and pulled her back and then I realised most people in the room would not have seen the slap, just a 26-year-old black girl holding this old white woman and looking like she was about to beat her.’

She stopped herself in time. The woman ran off ‘and I never saw her again, thank goodness’.

If the contretemps had turned really nasty and fists had flown, it could have ruined her political career before it had even begun. But Kemi had the nous to hold back. This was just a skirmish. She had bigger battles to fight.

As a black woman, she continued to reject the very concept of positive discrimination, challenging what she saw as the lazy pigeonholing of black people by those on the Left.

In 2009, Baroness Scotland, the first woman and the first ethnic minority person to become Attorney General, was exposed for employing an illegal immigrant as her housekeeper.

There were calls for her resignation but Labour’s Tessa Jowell came to her defence, arguing that ‘what Scotland represented for young black women has been amazing’.

Badenoch was outraged. ‘As a 29-year-old black woman,’ she wrote to a newspaper, ‘I can state categorically that Baroness Scotland is no role model of mine.’

‘She has broken a law that she herself drove through Parliament. It is inappropriate and patronising to brush off law-breaking on the basis of someone’s ethnicity.’

She spelt out her hatred of identity politics in a newspaper article. ‘Everyone in public life should judge ideas on the quality of their contents, not the identity of their proponents.’ For good measure, she declared in another letter to the press: ‘Britain is the least racist country on earth.’

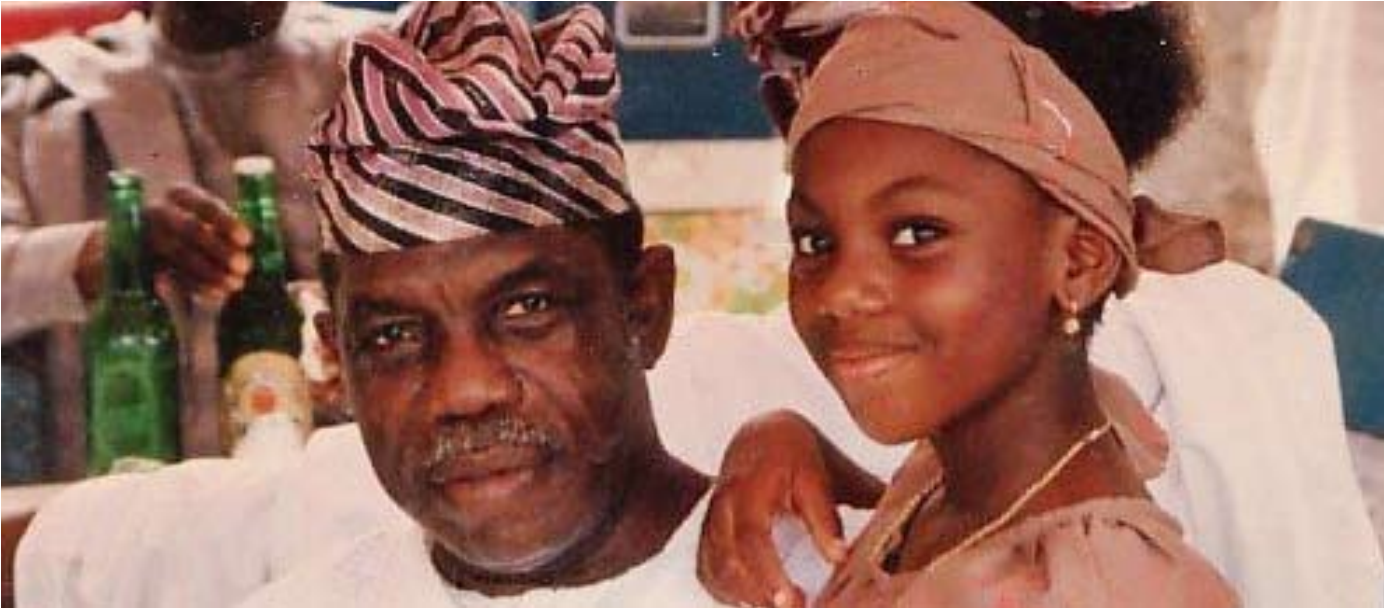
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## How Bob Geldof’s ‘patronising’ mission to save Africa inspired Kemi Badenoch to go to war with the virtue-signalling Left



Leadership potential: Kemi Badenoch, and left, aged seven in Nigeria with her grandfather

Picture: DANIEL HAMBURY/STELLA PICTURES



IN TOMORROW'S  ON SUNDAY

Why even Left-wing feminists respect Kemi's stance on trans issues