
DEVELOPMENT OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE FIRST LADYSHIP IN AFRICA

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The subject of the First Ladies of African countries has remained widely omitted from consideration within Russian historiography. The article discusses the formation and development of the institution of the First Lady in Africa over 60 years of independence and shows its impact on the globalization process. The socio-political activity of the wives of African heads of states is largely determined by the framework of the traditional society and has a wide range, from a passive stay in the shadow of the spouse to becoming de facto a co-ruler of the state. In the context of political liberalization, the role of the First Ladies has significantly increased. Within the framework of regional organizations, they participate in solving important problems of the development of the continent, for example, famine relief and fight against HIV/AIDS, and contribute to the establishment of gender equality in society. Their activities intensively affect the formation of a favorable political image of their spouses and their countries in general. For many years there have been disputes in African society over the formalization of the First Lady's status, primarily because of inevitable expenditures from the state budget. The formation of the institution of the First Lady in the countries of the continent obviously demonstrates dynamics but is fraught with a number of problems. There also emerges a close connection and interdependence between this process and the increasing role of women in society.

Keywords: *globalization, Africa, institution of the First Lady, gender equality, fight against HIV/AIDS, OAFLA, image.*

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, globalization permeates all spheres of socio-political, economic and cultural life of every society. In the era of growing economic and socio-political integration, the world is becoming increasingly interconnected. Thanks to the ubiquity of new technologies and media this is relevant even in the current situation of isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Experts give various assessments of the effect of globalization on the African countries, which are mostly far from positive (e.g., in economic terms the countries of the continent still remain mainly exporters of raw materials). The reasons lie in the imperfect management, spread of corruption, underdeveloped infrastructure, etc.

In the frame of the current international relations, negotiations play an increasingly important role; therefore, the so-called soft power has become one of the generally ac-

cepted tools in the world politics. So, the First Ladies appear to have great and exceptional opportunities and even advantages. During state visits, together with their high-ranking spouses the First Ladies address various audiences on the topics of culture, health, children, HIV/AIDS, *etc.* Such involvement of the First Ladies in public diplomacy can be considered one of the elements of a country's soft power. Some political leaders' harsh communication style can be softened by their wives' gentler communication and behavior. At the same time, the First Ladies' effective influence on a country's image depends not only and not as much on their behavior but on the objectivity and manner of presenting information in the media. This is a very important aspect since in contemporary world the image of the head of a state and of the First Lady is becoming one of the strategic tools of the state's foreign policy.

In the modern world, the spouses of heads of states, especially of states called democratic, often play an important role. Under democracy, the First Ladyship has become one of the political resources that contribute to the stability of power and harmonization of its relations with civil society; therefore, the image of the wife of the head of a state becomes an important element of both his image and the image of the state. One may give the examples of the American First Ladies Jacqueline Kennedy, Nancy Reagan, Laura Bush, Hillary Clinton, as well as Raisa Gorbacheva (USSR), Christina Fernandez de Kirchner (Argentina) and others.

Unlike the Western leaders, most African leaders have been protecting their private life sphere. However, since the elements of Western political culture penetrate the local reality, the situation changes. In Africa, the institution of the First Lady belongs to informal sphere, but this is far from being an African peculiarity. The First Lady does not directly participate in decision-making, but she can exert a great personal influence on her husband and, therefore, the decisions.

Background

Over the 60 years history of independent development in more than 50 countries of the African continent, dozens of heads of state have changed. The history of some countries presents a real kaleidoscope of legally elected presidents, as well as of military rulers who succeed each other (*e.g.*, in Nigeria and Ghana). At the same time, for various reasons, there were only five presidents in Botswana, four in Senegal and Mozambique, and only three in Zimbabwe where Robert Mugabe held this post for 30 years (1987–2017). Not all their wives can be formally classified as 'First Ladies' (spouses of elected heads of state); according to this criterion, for example, life partners of military rulers are not included in the list. But each of them remained in the history of their country. The gallery of portraits of the First Ladies is vast and diverse and includes many bright personalities. Some African women were (and remain) First Ladies for long periods: Mrs. Constanca de Obiang (acting First Lady of Equatorial Guinea) – for 41 years, Mrs. Janet Museveni (acting First Lady of Uganda) – for 34 years, Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak (Egypt) – for 30 years, Mrs. Betty Kaunda (Zambia) – for 27 years, Mrs. Nana Rawlings (Ghana) – for 20 years, Mrs. Marcelina Rafael (Mozambique) – for 19 years, Mrs. Theopolina Kachimune (Namibia) – for 15 years, and Mrs. Ruth Williams Khama (Botswana) – for 14 years. On the contrary, some First Ladies hold for a very short time, just a few months: Victoria Aguiyi-Ironsi and Margaret Shonekan (Nigeria), Charlotte Harland-Scott (Zambia). Graça Machel became the only woman in the world histo-

ry who was the First Lady of two countries: Mozambique (as wife of Samora Machel, 1975–1986) and South Africa (as wife of Nelson Mandela, 1998–1999).

There are several books that consider the life and work of former and acting African First Ladies as well as the society's and media's attitude towards them. In the present article I refer to some of such works. Some personalities, like Mrs. Chantal Biya (Cameroon) became the main characters of a number of books (*e.g.*, Verhoeven 2008; Abega 2018; Hugeux 2016) where their active charity efforts in various foundations as well as their contacts with other First Ladies of the region are described. In his book, Vincent Hugeux (2016) provides abundant biographical information on many presidential wives, mainly French-speaking (Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, *etc.*), as well as on the former First Lady of Zimbabwe – Mrs. Grace. Saboura Dounia Kagne (2018) focuses on the First Lady of Chad – Mrs. Hinda Deby Itno.

In their youth the wives of some African presidents were their comrades-in-arms in the struggle for independence of their countries. Some were even called 'Mothers' of the Nation during their lifetime according to the African tradition. For example, Ngina Kenyatta ('Mama Ngina'), the wife of Kenya's first president Jomo Kenyatta, participated in the anti-colonial struggle, was arrested and imprisoned. Before her marriage, Graça Machel underwent military training in the FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front); the former First Lady of Namibia Mrs. Penehupifo Pohamba got military training in SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organisation). Mrs. Betty Kaunda, the wife of the first president of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, was a faithful companion to her husband.

First Ladies of some African countries (Senegal, Botswana, Gabon, Cote d'Ivoire, Seychelles, and Mauritius) were white females; some of them were citizens of European countries – Great Britain and France. In most cases, the heads of these African states contracted interracial marriages while studying in the West. French women became twice the First Ladies of Senegal: Mrs. Colette Senghor (born Hubert) was the wife of the first president Leopold Sedar Senghor who came to power in 1960; and Mrs. Viviane Wade – the wife of President Abdoulaye Wade (2002–2012). Today, French women are First Ladies of Côte d'Ivoire (Mrs. Dominique Ouattara) and of Gabon (Mrs. Sylvia Bongo Ondimba).

In 1966, Seretse Khama became the President of Botswana. Since 1948 he had been married to the English woman Ruth Williams. Interracial marriage between a traditional leader of the BaNgwato people (one of the eight ethnic groups Tswana to which more than 90 per cent of the population of Botswana belong) and a small clerk from London who drove an ambulance during World War II, was contracted during his studies at the University of London, and for several years stayed in the center of attention of international politics and public. Having survived the quit, the expulsion from home by her father, the pressure of her husband's clan and of the British government, Mrs. R. Khama remained actively involved in Botswanan public life for all her husband's years in power. Later, highly respected as the widow of the revered first President of the country, she became the chairman of the Botswana Red Cross and headed several local women's organizations. In May 2002, Mrs. R. Khama died of throat cancer and was buried in the capital city, Gaborone. Perhaps, one of the reasons why their son Yan Khama (president of the country in 2008–2018) remained single was too high a standard set by his parents' happy marriage. The story of this romantic love served as the plot for many books

(e.g., Williams, S. 2007), as well as for research monographs on interracial marriages and even for a movie.¹

The participation of presidential spouses in socio-political life may take various forms depending on historical period and their personal traits. In the early years of independence, the First Ladies' functions were limited to accompanying their top-ranked husbands at important government events and during foreign visits. Some of them visited our country: for example, the wife of the first president of Zambia K. Kaunda, Mrs. Betty Kaunda, accompanied her husband during his visit to the USSR in 1974.² The scope of socio-political activity of the African First Ladies is broad: from passive stay in the shadow of her spouse to becoming a co-governor of the state, for example, as it happened in Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Egypt and Tunisia in certain historical periods. The second wife of the acting president of Côte d'Ivoire Allasane Ouattara, Mrs. D. Ouattara, has significantly contributed to his coming to power. It is believed that she represents a new type of the African First Lady and is a vivid example of changing attitudes to the role of women in African society.

In the 1990s, with the start of a new wave of democratization, some serious changes took place in African society and political culture. On the one hand, political and economic modernization in several countries of the continent created prerequisites for equalizing the gender balance in politics, and on the other, women increased their political activity. This is a common trend for African countries that have taken the path of democratic reforms or have returned to this tendency. In Africa, the political power is a multidimensional and complex system of social relations. To a large extent, they imply a personified perception of power, that is, the political process is mainly perceived through the prism of the personality of the country's leader. The main function and mission of the First Ladyship as a social institution is to humanize power, that is, to make it easy-to-understand for most. African women demonstrate increasing political and social activity. The process of social and socio-political development in the countries of the continent objectively brought to life the institution of the First Lady.

The political liberalization implies not only a noticeable growth of social and political activity of spouses of the heads of some states but also the First Ladies' desire to contribute efforts to the solution of some important problems of our time, for example, famine relief and fight against AIDS. This was first demonstrated by the spouses of the Presidents of Senegal (Mrs. Elizabeth Diouf), Egypt (Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak) and Nigeria (Mrs. Maryam Babangida), who were among the six First Ladies of the world-initiators of the World Summit to Improve the Economic Status of Rural Women (Geneva 1992). The First Ladies of South Africa (Mrs. Marike de Klerk) and Ghana (Mrs. Nana Rawlings) also attended the summit. All of them advocated a more autonomous role for the wives of the heads of state on certain issues of international politics. The activity of a number of African First Ladies was evident at the Beijing Conference in 1995.

In 1996, one of the first expanded meetings of the First Ladies of Africa took place in the capital of Cameroon, Yaoundé, as a part of the summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The meeting was chaired by the First Lady of Cameroon, Mrs. Chantal Biya; the First Ladies of Botswana, Burundi, Gabon, Cape Verde, Malawi, Namibia, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Tanzania also participated. The focus was on strategies to improve the life of rural women, the outcome of the discussion were included in the official OAU communiqué. The first autonomous summit of the First Ladies of

Africa took place in 1997 in the Nigerian capital city, Abuja, and was chaired by Mrs. Maryam Abacha (Nigeria). Among the main issues discussed was the problem of regional food security.³

The issue of the role of the First Ladies in African countries has also been raised by the spouses of presidents of other countries. In 1997, the French journal *Jeune Afrique* published a controversy on this subject between the First Lady of Mali Mrs. Adame Ba Konaré and the former First Lady of Benin Mrs. Rosine Soglo. Interviewed by this journal in January 1997, Madame Konaré noted that presidents' wives had a hard time: they are suspected of meddling into government affairs and accused of causing their husbands' fall. She illustrated her words with the example of Rosine Soglo, 'If her behavior is questionable, then what about her husband, the former president?' (Sage 2000: 60). Wounded by these words, Mrs. Soglo sent her response to Mrs. Konaré to the journal which published it in March 1997. The latter regretted the misunderstanding on the pages of the journal, emphasizing that she had only wanted to express female solidarity but not to criticize President of Benin Nicephore Soglo. In this respect, two African First Ladies actually raised questions of how the wife of the head of state should behave and what degree of political influence a woman not elected by citizens but still disagreeing on a purely ceremonial role should have.

The participation of the First Ladies in public life emphasizes the changing role of spouses of heads of state as a part of a wider process of female political emancipation. According to the figurative expression of the French author Alexandra Sage, they 'left the boudoirs and rose to the stands' (Sage 2000: 60).

The activities of the First Ladies of African countries, their political influence, as well as the influence of their behavior on the image of their top-ranked spouses has been underestimated in the African literature on the subject. Studying the subject of the evolution of the 'First Lady' institution, the present author takes into account the persistent influence of the traditional factor in African society. Several approaches from modern political science are applied in our study: the 'role partner' approach (determining the type of partnership: full, partial, backstage partner, marriage partner or non-partner); an approach within the framework of theories of political leadership, a communicative approach (the type of the First Lady's interaction with the society – creating foundations, projects for environmental protection, urban improvement, *etc.*), as well as an approach that takes into account particular personal participation and speeches of the presidential wife in various situations. The subject of the research in the latter case is metaphorically designated in the modern political lexicon as 'white glove pulpit.' This important accessory of the image of the American First Ladies has become their symbol. This term is the opposite of the 'bully pulpit': that is how the 'incomparably broader possibilities of the president are called' (Watson 2000: 126). The neologism 'bully pulpit' was coined in 1909 by American President Theodore Roosevelt in order to describe how leaders use their 'wonderful' or 'excellent' program to validate their agenda and ideas (see Keane 2015).

Russian political scientist Yuri V. Irkhin applied the above approaches to the analysis of the 'First Lady' institution in the USA, emphasizing that for a greater effectiveness of research 'it is desirable to use all the developed theories, approaches and methods in a comprehensive manner' (Irkhin 2015: 186).

Practice shows a direct correlation between the effectiveness of the ruling political elite and its representatives' education level. As the Russian researcher Dmitri M. Bondarenko points out, 'the path to affirming human rights in Africa as a concept and a practice lies, first of all, through education, enlightenment ... focusing on the value system of civil society, in which human rights play a central role' (Bondarenko 2012: 31). To achieve this, the competence of the country's leader and his team is important, with the First Lady often becoming its informal member.

The key to success for many African First Ladies has been and remains their professional activity. Being lawyers (Mrs. Graça Machel Mozambique and South Africa, Mrs. Sika Bella Caboré (Burkina Faso), economists (Mrs. Marike de Klerk and Mrs. Zanele Mbeki (South Africa), Mrs. Mialy Rajoelina (Madagascar), Mrs. Ana Afonso Dias Lourenço (Angola)), doctors (Mrs. C. Kaseba-Sata (Zambia), Mrs. Sia Koroma (Sierra Leone), Mrs. Christophine Mutarika (Malawi), Mrs. Penehupifo Pohamba (Namibia), Mrs. Edith-Lucie Bongo (Gabon), Mrs. Aisha Buhari (Nigeria)), engineers (Mrs. Aissata Issoufou (Niger)), teachers (Mrs. Betty Kaunda and Mrs. Tandiwe Banda (Zambia), Mrs. Maria Nyerere (Tanzania), Mrs. Ernestina Mills (Ghana), Mrs. Patricia Muluzi (Malawi)), philologists and translators (Mrs. Simone Gbagbo (Côte d'Ivoire), Mrs. Naglaa Mahmoud (Egypt)), artists (Mrs. Nana Rawlings, (Ghana)), they supported their husbands both during the election campaigns and their stay in power. Extraordinary and very interesting person is the acting First Lady of Burundi Mrs. Denise Bucumi Nkurunziza. A Christian and an active parishioner, she was ordained a deacon in 2000.⁴ In 2010, after five years as the First Lady, she graduated from The Leadership Institute Burundi with a diploma in pastoral education. In July 2011 she was ordained a pastor which is the only case of this kind in the world.

The personalities of the African First Ladies, so different in age, level of education, religion and even skin color, do not yield to a simple generalization. But most of them are united by their sense of duty and their understanding of the importance of their husbands' work. As the First Lady of Nigeria Mrs. A. Buhari noted in an interview, '...the duty of the wife of any leader is to help her husband, giving him the opportunity to solve public issues' (NAN 2015).

Public Work of the First Ladies: A Balance of Success and Problems

The First Ladies who have chosen an active position engage in activities in social sphere where there are many problems requiring their participation: education, healthcare, combating HIV/AIDS, violence against women and children, adaptation of children-former participants in military conflicts. Everything depends on their choice and desire to be truly useful to the society. No wonder the former US First Lady Laura Bush once said: 'While a president has every problem come to his desk, a first lady has the ability to choose what she wants to work on' (McBride 2009). The opportunities for African First Ladies to participate in public life are largely determined by the framework of a traditional society with its strong system of ethnic, family, and clan ties. An African leader governs in a multi-ethnic environment and has to take this into account in order to maintain his power and the stability in society. For example, six presidents of Zambia represented different ethnic groups of the country: Kenneth Kaunda (1964–1991) was Tonga, Frederick Chiluba (1991–2001) and Michael Sata (2011–2014) were Bemba, Levi Mwanawasa (2001–2008) was Lange, Rupiah Banda (2008–

2011) is Chewa by his father's side and Ngoni by his mother's, Edgar Lungu (elected on January 20, 2015) is Nsenga. But they all have managed to maintain peace in the country under conditions of ethnic diversity; so ethnic and racial solidarity is inherent in the Zambians (see Bondarenko 2011). The Zambian First Ladies have definitely contributed to this. For example, together with their spouses they participated in the traditional ceremonies *nkwvala* and *kulamba* which are the guardians of the culture of the country's peoples.

The degree of public activity of the First Ladies varies depending on their age, education, value orientations received in the parental family, partisanship, religious views, form of relations with the spouse, as well as their personal qualities. Countries with predominant Muslim population have their peculiarities. Their presidents are often polygamous, so the First Lady is not always clearly defined. Some polygamous presidents choose one of their wives to be the First Lady, as, for example, Olusegun Obasanjo (Nigeria). He granted this role to Mrs. S. Obasanjo, President Yahya Jammeh of Gambia – to Mrs. Z. Jammeh. Polygamy is also a quality of some leaders of non-Muslim countries of Africa. Former South African President Jacob Zuma belongs to the Zulu, polygamous by tradition, while the laws of his country allow traditional polygamous marriage. He openly admitted, 'That's my culture. It does not take anything from me, from my political beliefs, including the belief in the equality of women' (BBC 2010). At the inauguration ceremony in 2009, he was accompanied by all his three spouses: Nompumelelo Ntuli, Sizakele Khumalo and Tobeka Madiba. In 2012, he married again – to Gloria Bonggi Ngema. During his first years in power this leader of the Republic of South Africa was most often accompanied at official events by Mrs. N. Ntuli who was sociable and actively participated in the country's public life.

An interesting example is Senegal where more than 80 per cent of the population professes Islam. A number of observers point at ecumenical tolerance in Senegalese politics (Bekker, Dodds and Khosa 2001; Mazrui *et al.* 2009). This is related to the reforms of the first president of the country Léopold Sédar Senghor who was Catholic. Other presidents of Senegal, Abdou Diouf and Abdoulaye Wade, were also tolerant in this regard.

The acting First Lady of Senegal, Mrs. Marème Faye Sall, has the image of a traditional Senegalese Muslim woman who puts the interests of her husband and her family above everything else. According to her official biography, she studied at the University in Dakar but after becoming mother she decided to devote herself to her family (Présidence du Sénégal. N.d.). In the eyes of the Muslim Senegalese electorate, this is a new type of the country's First Lady since her two predecessors were Christian foreigners. Well-known Senegalese journalist and public figure Madiambal Diagne notes that the image of this First Lady is understandable and close to citizens 'because she looks and behaves like most women in the country' (Diagne 2013).

In Islamic society, a woman's approach to social life is often demonstrated by the clothes she wears. This is clearly seen in Egypt. Mrs. Jehan Sadat (the wife of Anwar Sadat, President of Egypt in 1970–1981) and Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak (the wife of Hosni Mubarak, President in 1981–2011) carried out their public activities as founders and leaders of several foundations recognized at local and international levels. They followed the Western fashion trends. Mrs. Naglaa Mahmoud's (President Mohammed Morsi's wife) clothes and headwear were conservative in style. Sometimes she wore

a niqab, a headdress that covers most of the face. The acting First Lady of Egypt Mrs. Entissar Amer, the wife of President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi, also follows local traditions in clothing. This was already evident on the day of the new President's inauguration when an elegant black and white hijab in Spanish style covered her head.

The main activity of the First Ladies is charity. The practice of recent decades shows that the charity activity of the First Ladies is a powerful tool for creating a positive image of their husbands. For example, in Senegal, all First Ladies were engaged in charity activities, except for Mrs. C. Senghor. Mrs. Z. Mbeki and Mrs. M. de Klerk (South Africa), Mrs. S. Obasanjo (Nigeria), Mrs. S. Mubarak (Egypt) and other ex-First Ladies were also engaged in charity. The acting First Lady of Cameroon, Mrs. Chantal Biya patronizes three charitable foundations. In 2004, she said in an interview, 'I invest in charity and humanitarian work. Thus, I believe I am helping the President a little in implementing his policy of combating poverty and sufferings of the people' (Vallet 2017). The acting First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire Mrs. D. Ouattara established her first charity foundation, *The Children of Africa*, in 1998, long before her husband came to power. Today this fund operates in Côte d'Ivoire and in ten other African countries.

The acting First Ladies of other countries of the continent are also engaged in charity activities. In November 2005, the First Lady of Burundi Mrs. Denise Bucumi Nkurunziza created a charity fund called the BUNTU Foundation. Its name derives from the nickname that Mrs. Nkurunziza received from the Church members for effective assistance to those in need meaning 'a merciful woman.' The Foundation provides support to people with HIV infection, war orphans, disabled and other vulnerable categories. Uganda's First Lady Mrs. Janet Museveni is the founder and chairwoman of several non-profit charitable organizations, including the Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans (UWESO), and the National Rural Women's Development Strategy. In March 2011, the wife of the President of Guinea Mrs. Djene Kaba Condé established the Foundation for Maternal and Child Social Promotion (PROSMI). Madagascar First Lady Mrs. Mialy Rajoelina heads the charity Association FITIA. She believes that the foundation should be based on love for one's neighbor. In June 2019, before a charity event in celebration of Independence Day, she said, 'There is nothing petty in love, you shouldn't do big things, a few right and just things would be enough to change the world'.⁵ The acting First Ladies of Zambia Mrs. Esther Lungu, of South Africa Mrs. Tshepo Motsepe, of Angola Mrs. Ana Afonso Dias Lourenço and many others are also engaged in charity.

However, practice shows that after their spouses resign the First Ladies' charitable foundations most often cease their activity or continue to exist only nominally. This is natural since these structures are often funded from the state treasury which stops with the end of the spouse's term in power. Indeed, in Senegal, the Serve Senegal Foundation (Fondation Servir Sénégal) created by the acting First Lady Mrs. M.F. Sall operates with success, while her predecessor's Mrs. V. Wade's Education and Health foundation have financial difficulties so that they even closed one of the hospitals sponsored by the foundation. The charitable foundation created by the First Lady of Senegal Mrs. E. Diouf in 1992 and named after her (Elizabeth Diouf Solidarité-Partage Fondation) also operates just occasionally, for example, its helped victims of fires in 2014.⁶ According to Souleymane Ndéné Ndiaye, the Prime Minister in the administration of former Presi-

dent A. Wade, 'in order to avoid the cessation of the charitable foundations of the First Ladies, it is necessary to develop a system of their continuity' (Dakaractu 2014).

The First Ladies' charity does not always find approval in society. In the late 1990s, the opposition and various NGOs already claimed that it had a flip side: although the projects of the First Ladies were not always well thought out and prepared, they had donors' preference. This happened with the funds of the First Ladies of Zambia (Mrs. Vera Chiluba), Ghana (Mrs. Nana Rawlings) and Nigeria (Mrs. S. Obasanjo) who were 'beneficiaries of millions of donor dollars' (Khan 1999).

During the 2016 presidential election campaign in Zambia, the opposition and some media sharply criticized the charity work of the First Lady Mrs. E. Lungu. They accused her of carrying out charity acts solely in order to support her husband as a candidate for presidency. Mrs. E. Lungu is a prominent member of the ruling party Patriotic Front (PF). Therefore, in June 2015, the party officially came out in her defense both as the First Lady and as its member. The official statement by PF representative Sunday Chanda read on national radio contained not only a refutation that Mrs. E. Lungu's charity would start the president's election campaign. He called these allegations 'hypocrisy and malice by sections of the media targeted at the First Lady Esther Lungu' (LV 2015). His speech was actually a detailed excursion into the history of the activities of all the First Ladies of the country. He recalled that all the previous First Ladies of Zambia were engaged in charity which is the norm in the modern world.

Offices of the First Ladies have their own websites where information about their activities is constantly updated. The development of the media and especially the Internet has provided additional opportunities. On the one hand, they constantly follow the participation of presidential spouses in elections, inaugurations, state visits and receptions, national celebrations (often happening on-line) as well as in various TV entertaining programs. On the other hand, these communication channels are often actively used by the First Ladies themselves who have personal pages on Facebook and Twitter. As a result, their frequent presence on the TV screen, in the media and in social networks supports a constant attention to them in society, while subconsciously strengthening in citizens' minds the importance and necessity of the institution of the First Lady.

First Ladies make a tangible contribution to the fight against HIV/AIDS on the continent. Most spouses of African leaders actively participate in the Organization of African First Ladies against HIV/AIDS (OAFLA) which was created in 2002 by decision of 37 First Ladies of African states who declared their readiness to speak out against AIDS and to campaign for improvement of life of women, young people and children (see Prokopenko 2017: 181–192).

First Ladies also draw public attention to such a serious problem as sexual violence against women and children. In Southern Africa, the wives of the presidents (Mrs. G. Machel in South Africa and Mrs. C. Kaseba-Sata in Zambia) made efforts to launch national campaigns against early marriage and female circumcision.

African First Ladies are increasingly involved in the work of women's international organizations. For example, Mrs. Tobeka Madiba Zuma (South Africa) represented the African continent at the first summit of the women's international organization Women 20 (W20) in Istanbul (Turkey) on October 16–17, 2015.

But the social efforts of some of the First Ladies are criticized by the opposition and media. Far from always and hardly all of their initiatives find support and approval

of the electorate. For example, in the mid-2000s some organizations in Uganda blamed the First Lady Mrs. J. Museveni who during the anti-AIDS campaign opposed the promotion of safer sex with condoms and suggested sexual abstinence. The First Ladies of Zambia were also criticized. The opposition, chiefly Michael Sata, the leader of the Patriotic Front (PF) and permanent political opponent of President Levi Mwanawasa, criticized the activities of the First Lady Mrs. Maureen Mwanawasa: he explained the success of her foundation's projects only with her First Lady status. Some people accused her of direct imitation of the previous First Lady, Mrs. Vera Chiluba who had chaired the national HOPE Foundation.

Critics reveal (sometimes fairly) the overlapping of First Ladies' activities with the functions of some ministries and departments. The work of the latter has clear policy and action plans, while the activities of the spouse of the head of state are often based on her personal choice, her interest in this area, political expediency, and sometimes directly depends on the amount of funds at her disposal. As a result, this leads to doubling expenses for the same sector as well as to delays in the implementation of projects. A perfect example of such a situation is Zambia. The opposition and local media have repeatedly criticized the First Lady Mrs. C. Kaseba-Sata for her excessive activity in the healthcare sector, believing that she partially replaced the Minister of Health. Indeed, she often participated in international conferences, starred in TV programs on women's health, for example, on the fight against cervical cancer. Actually, there was nothing extraordinary in her doing so since she is a recognized expert in the field of obstetrics and gynecology in the country and has been a practicing doctor in the clinical hospital of the University in the capital city Lusaka for more than 25 years, and she also lectured in medicine. But the oppositional critics reminded that in some cases the presidential wife went beyond her generally approved First Lady's functions. The next First Lady of Zambia, Mrs. E. Lungu, has also focused her efforts in health sector after her husband Edgar Lungu became President. Her work schedule included speeches at the US First Lady's Forum against cervical cancer and at the session of the Organization of African First Ladies against HIV/AIDS, *etc.* The Zambian civil society organizations would criticize her activities, which, in their opinion, sometimes replace the functions of some ministries and departments. On September 1, 2015 the Non-Governmental Organizations Coordinating Council (NGOCC) of Zambia even issued an official appeal that recommended the First Lady to adhere to the traditional framework of behavior of the president's wife, and submitted a requirement for the government to 'inform the Zambian people which budgetary allocation Madam Lungu uses for the donations she is making as well as spends on logistical support for the trips' (Mubanga 2015). NGOCC stipulated that this would ensure transparency and accountability of the First Lady's expenses and protect her from criticism in the future.

In recent years, in many African countries (Angola, Egypt, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Tunisia, South Africa, *etc.*) presidents and their spouses have often become the focus of close attention of the media and international community because of high-profile corruption scandals. This public evil has intervened with the development of some countries of the continent from the first years of their independence. For example, in Niger the opposition accused the wife of the country's first president Hamani Diori (in power from 1960 to 1974) of using her position for personal enrichment. Mrs. Aissa Diori, who owned several villas in the prestigious quarter of the capital Niamey, rented

them at high prices to foreign diplomats and French experts (Krivushin 2012: 492). A high-profile corruption scandal with an international outcry was connected with the President of Zambia Frederick Chiluba and his second wife Mrs. Regina Chiluba. Large-scale thefts from the state treasury of Tunisia under President Ben Ali who passed away in September 2019 were associated with his wife Leila Trabelsi. After his overthrow a report was published on the export of capital from the country amounting to \$20 billion.

The First Ladies of Nigeria were also under charges. President Sani Abacha's spouse Maryam was involved in the theft of \$2.3 billion (Hodess *et al.* 2004), president Goodluck Jonathan's wife Patience was at the center of corruption scandal in September 2015, just a couple of months after her husband's resignation. Local media have also repeatedly written about Stella Obasanjo's involvement in corruption. In 2018, a number of Zimbabwean medias including the government-owned *The Zimbabwe Herald* published police reports regarding the investigation of the alleged role of former First Lady Grace Mugabe in ivory smuggling during R. Mugabe's tenure (Somerville 2018). The acting Nigerian president Muhammadu Buhari has also come under severe criticism. The reason for this was his First Lady's watch that she wore during her husband's inauguration in 2015: local media valued it at 52 thousand US dollars, three-month president's salary (Silva 2015). Guinean emigrant opposition living in France posted unflattering information about Guinea's First Lady Mrs. Djene Kaba Condé on their websites. They wrote, for example, that since her husband came to power her personal wealth has grown significantly as she takes bribes from those seeking posts in the administration (Soumah 2015).

First Ladies are also accused of squandering. Western media often publish photos (some with harsh comments about expensive outfits and accessories of famous world brands) of the former First Ladies of Angola, Mrs. Ana Paula dos Santos, and of Zimbabwe, Mrs. Grace Mugabe. Because of the latter's love for luxury, the British journalists even nicknamed her 'Gucci Grace' (BBC 2017). In the eyes of the Zimbabweans, she contrasted sharply with the president's first wife, Sally Hayfron, a rather modest woman and a real comrade-in-arms for her husband.

First Ladies' Participation in Politics and Gender Situation in Society

Another important subject is the First Ladies' participation in campaigns for election or re-election of their husbands to supreme state posts. The First Ladies do not have a legal status and there are no sets of their duties and requirements including those describing conjugal assistance during election campaigns. But those of them who decide to take this step very often help their marriage partners to win. Ideally, such women represent vivid visual images of marriage and family life of nominated candidates. They often (most likely with the help of PR specialists) speak authoritatively on election campaign issues helping to explain to the general public the merits of their partners-candidates. It is easier for African wives than for their husbands to speak freely about their excellent personal qualities and achievements. Tips for their husbands in writing campaign speeches on difficult issues in a simpler, more accessible language for voters, direct appeals to women-voters on female issues, raising funds for the husband's campaign – all these tactics help African First Ladies affect the voters' choice.

It is during election campaigns that the implicit but effective influence of the candidate's wife on the voters is clearly manifested. We mean here her emotional influence over her husband which is proper as a rule to any married couple. The outcome of elections, especially in Africa, often depends on the emotional reaction of voters to candidates. Any candidate's wife even if she is very far from politics can make a significant contribution to a positive image of the applicant for the top post. Her speeches, including media publications, and frequent showing up in public next to her husband simultaneously achieve two goals: on the one hand, they provide a personal look at the candidate, and on the other, as already mentioned, they reformulate some of the candidate's views, bringing them closer to voters. Another important factor is the effortlessness for the candidate's wife to carry out efficacious emotional attacks on his rivals or on the media, which, as a rule, cause a less negative resonance in society. All this taken together humanizes the image of the candidate and brings it closer to the voter. Mrs. Maureen Mwanawasa and Mrs. Tandiwe Banda (Zambia) were good examples in this regard. The subsequent First Lady of Zambia, Mrs. C. Kaseba-Sata, tested her strength four times (in 2001, 2006, 2008, and 2011) since Michael Sata became president only at the fourth attempt, therefore his election in 2011 can be fairly called their common victory.

As a rule, the greater openness of private life of a presidential candidate helps him to reduce the distance to voters and to 'get closer' to them. In African countries with a large percent of population professing Christianity, the voters attach great importance to family values. Probably this factor was taken into account by the image makers working with Edgar Lungu who won the presidential elections in Zambia in January 2015. At rallies and meetings during that election campaign the married couple with their six children demonstrated a 'we-are-like-you' image influencing the associative level of the voters who may prefer a candidate with similar basic value-related personality traits.

The active social efforts of wives of heads of state not only have the most positive effect on the formation of a favorable political image of their husbands but also contribute to their husband's legitimization. A number of African political scientists and analysts note that the public activity of the First Ladies supports in an indirect ways their husbands' careers. Many presidents would publicly recognize the merits of their wives who support them during their election campaigns and in their work at the country's main post. The President of Zambia R. Banda thanked his wife Tandiwe in his farewell speech. In October 2012, the next president of the country Michael Sata called his wife Christine his 'right hand' and admitted, referring to his presidency: '...without her, I would have failed to come where I am now' (Zambia Online 2012).

In the context of globalization, the international image is becoming increasingly important for the African leaders. As Tatiana S. Denisova notes, '...from their first days in power, leaders of African states set the task of establishing themselves as leaders recognized by the international community' (Denisova 2016: 579). In this regard, active public activities of every First Lady contribute significantly to a positive image of her high-ranking spouse in the eyes of the world community, financial donors and investors. Presidents of Ghana, South Africa, Senegal, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya and other countries consistently encourage their wives' active work in the political arena as well. The increasing political activity of women in the early 2000s was also observed in the countries of Maghreb. The Presidents of Tunisia, Egypt, and Sudan supported the par-

ticipation of their spouses in the regional women's summit in November 2001 in Cairo (Egypt) under the auspices of the League of Arab States (LAS).

The First Lady is, on the one hand, the head of state's partner in marriage, and on the other, she represents women of their country. Therefore, the influence of the First Ladies mirrors the position of women in their countries. As noted by Nadezhda A. Shvedova, the publicity of such an influence '...always depends on the prevailing tendency in society towards the perception and implementation of the principles and policies of gender equality in the country' (Shvedova 2013: 53). Over the recent decades, many countries in Africa have achieved significant progress with gender equality issues in politics. In a number of African states, primarily in the South African region, gender equality in the political sphere has become a practically implemented principle of state's politics (see Prokopenko 2018). According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in 2020 Rwanda, South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique were ranked among the countries of the world where women make up more than 40 per cent of the government and/or parliament (IPU N.d.). There is no doubt that the First Ladies have significantly contributed to this process since many of them advocate gender equality in politics.

But this is not the case in all the countries of the continent. The increasing activity of the First Ladies of Nigeria, called by some local researchers the 'First Lady Syndrome' (see Mama 1995; Smith 2007), has no significant effect on the participation of women in the country's political life. Under General Ibrahim Babangida there was not a single woman in the government, under President Olusegun Obasanjo there were four of them in 1999 and six in 2003. In Botswana, the significant success in democracy has not yet become a guarantee of gender symmetry in politics: today its parliament has only 10 per cent of female members (IPU N.d.). The problems associated with maintaining traditional way of life in African society still persist: the status of women is largely determined by the traditions that have developed over the centuries. In countries with low living standards the population is more aware of the image of the First Lady as a housewife and a mother of a large family, far from politics. The South African authors note that a number of First Ladies such as Mrs. Hinda Déby (Chad), Mrs. J. Museveni (Uganda) and Mrs. G. Mugabe (Zimbabwe) although they became models for women in their countries, still reinforce the idea that a woman's power and influence is acceptable only when she is married to an influential man (Van Wyk, Nyere, and Muresan 2018: 16).

Analyzing the role of the First Ladies in African countries, one should point out a certain dualism. Political scientists believe that the space occupied by the leaders' wives should be used by them for the benefit of their countries' development; therefore, they support their increasing public activity. Meanwhile, the activists of the female movement are often opposed to the First Ladies' dominant part, believing that they should play a role complementary to women's movements. Indeed, in some countries (Tunisia, Egypt) presidential wives 'absorb' almost the entire political space belonging to the women of the country (see Grinin and Korotaev 2016: 283–284). As shown by the above-mentioned examples, a number of First Ladies actively speak out and act on behalf of the foundations they created thus going beyond the scope of their immediate responsibilities as partners of the heads of state. For example, Vera Chiluba (Zambia, passed away in June 2011) often used her HOPE Foundation to meet the country's emerging political opposition.

Therefore, a problem arises: how to establish clear limits of political participation. This is due to the fact that some First Ladies, often being prominent members of ruling parties, simultaneously hold political and government posts. This happened in the past, for example, in Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Tunisia and other countries. The political influence of the president's wife in Kenya was also considerable. During the life of Jomo Kenyatta, Mama Ngina took part in discussions on delicate state problems and later continued to maintain a confiding relationship with his successor. In Nigeria, the First Lady Mrs. S. Obasanjo often appeared on local TV (making appeals to the nation too) standing in front of the national emblem, although this is usually a presidential prerogative. There also cases of First Ladies coming to power. Thus, the acting First Lady of Uganda, J. Museveni was elected parliament member in 2006 and 2011, and in 2009–2016 she was the Minister for the affairs of the Karamoja region, and since June 7, 2016 she has been the Minister of Education. South African researchers write that in Burundi 'The Office of the First Lady (Mrs. Denise Bucumi Nkurunziza – *author's note*) was often used for strengthening diplomatic relations between Burundi and the international community' (Van Wyk and Nyere 2019b). First ladies in Africa: a close look at how three have wielded influence. URL: ...). In Zambia, the Office of the First Lady has today its own section on the official website of the government.⁷ In Equatorial Guinea (where President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo has been in power since 1979) the official website of the government reported in July 2018 that the Prime Minister 'visited the First Lady's office' to report on matters related to health, education, and other social affairs in the country (Micha 2018).

African scholars reveal the political background of activities of a number of First Ladies. For example, Ilare de Prance Pocam (Cameroon) who studied the work of the charitable foundations of Mrs. D. Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire) and Mrs. Chantal Campaoré (Burkina Faso) writes, 'On the one hand, they became political players by proxy because their social activities help to humanize their husbands' image, but on the other hand, they are recognized political actors, their husbands' partners in the game of gaining/maintaining power' (Vallet 2017). In 2004, another Cameroonian researcher Fred Eboko called the First Lady of Cameroon, Mrs. Chantal Biya who had been active in various associations for twenty years, a 'shadow president' (Eboko 2004: 102). He believes that President Paul Biya retained power in many respects 'thanks to his wife's ability to act in the public sphere.'

According to South African scholars Jo-Ansie van Wyk and Chidochashe Nyere, Mrs. Janet Museveni (Uganda), Mrs. Grace Mugabe (Zimbabwe) and Mrs. Denise Bucumi Nkurunziza (Burundi) have been among the most influential First Ladies of the continent during the last decade (Van Wyk and Nyere 2019a). Indeed, each of them was active nationally, regionally and internationally. These African women have actively mobilized their spouses' presidential support using various strategies: turning to personal stories, to stories of struggle for independence, to culture and religion. However, they often claimed that their husbands were ordained by God. At the same time, they either denied very skillfully and in every possible way, or underestimated, or totally ignored the failures of their husbands' rule. The researchers from South Africa argue that examples of the activities of the above-mentioned First Ladies convincingly prove that despite their participation in solving the problems of women, they 'have their own political agendas and have supported their husbands' long-term tenures. In institutionalizing

femocracy, they support undemocratic rule in Africa and they failed to become substantive representatives of women in their country' (Van Wyk, Nyere, and Muresan 2018: 16–17). The active support by these African women of the long rule of their husbands-presidents actually reinforce undemocratic rule in Africa. Therefore, the First Ladies cannot be the main representatives of women of their countries.

The increasing political activity of the First Ladies is also manifested in the claims of some of them to their countries' top posts. They boldly declare their readiness to take on the fate of their country after their husbands' resignation. Power is sweet, and being close to a husband with such power one can hardly avoid the temptation. A number of First Ladies had presidential ambitions, for example, in Zambia, Egypt, Tunisia, *etc.*, but those have not yet been fulfilled. Tatiana Denisova writes about such opportunities for the First Lady of Ghana, Mrs. Nana Rawlings in 2000 (Denisova 2016: 398). The widow of Zambian President M. Sata Mrs. C. Kaseba-Sata was among the first candidates to announce their decision to run in the presidential election in 2015, considering it as her duty to her late husband. But sometimes the First Ladies, trying to fulfill their presidential ambitions, violate the rules established by law. Thus, before the presidential elections of 2013 in Madagascar the First Lady of the country in 2002–2009 Mrs. Lalao Ravalomanana put forward her candidacy in violation of the restrictions for the period of residence in the country before the elections, thus provoking the-then president Andry Nirina Rajoelina to submit his candidacy after a line has been drawn under the list of candidates. In Tunisia, the intention of the First Lady Leila Trabelsi (she was often called the 'Ruler of Carthage') to run for the presidency in 2010 elections was strongly criticized in the society.

The attempts of the First Ladies to fight for the country's top position produce a certain impact on the formation of the institution of First Lady in Africa. Presidents themselves recognize the possibility (and even necessity) of a woman appearing at the top of the power pyramid. The ex-president of Zambia Levi Mwanawasa expressed once such an opinion (Dale N.d.); South African President Jacob Zuma said in August 2014 that 'The ANC has come in to say women must be in power. I think the country is ready for a woman president' (Mail & Guardian 2014). Thanks to his support, his former wife Mrs. Nkosazan Dlamini-Zuma, a prominent member of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party and chairwoman of the African Union (AU) Commission in 2012–2017 led the election campaign in 2017 ambitious to become the party leader which in case of victory would have enabled her to become president in May 2019.

The story of the failed climb to the top of the power pyramid of the former First Lady of Zimbabwe Grace Mugabe is indicative in this respect. For a long time, her long-time associate – the vice-president of the country –, Joice Mujuru, was considered the successor of her husband as president of the country. But in 2014 Joice Mujuru's political career failed: at the congress of the ruling ZANU–PF party in December 2014 Mrs. Mujuru was removed from office, and in March of the following year she was expelled from the party. As Russian scholar Vladimir Shubin notes, the reason for this was the accusation of Mrs. Mujuru by Robert Mugabe and his wife, '...in a conspiracy to kill him in order to obtain the presidency' (Shubin 2015: 135). In December 2014, after the re-election of Mr Mugabe as the leader of ZANU – PF, the First Lady took charge of the Women's League of the party. 52-year-old Grace Mugabe was considered the unofficial head of one of the factions in the Zimbabwean government called the

ZANU – PF Generation 40 (G40) and in the event of her 93-year-old husband's death she could have claimed power. The opposing faction was led by the 75-year-old new vice president Emmerson Mnangagwa. Although in early October 2017 the president publicly rejected the idea of transferring power to his wife claiming it would be unconstitutional, Mnangagwa was removed from his post on October 6, expelled from the party and forced to flee to South Africa. However, the First Lady's hopes to take the post of head of state were not destined to come true. On November 15, 2017, the military took control of the situation in the country, on November 20, 2017 Robert Mugabe was removed from the post of the leader of the country and the party, while his wife and several of her supporters were expelled from the party.

The Problem of Legal Status of the First Ladies

The institutionalization of the First Lady involves the adoption of laws that would define and record her role, functions, resource allocation, accountability, as well as monitoring and criteria for evaluating her activities. In African countries, the position of the First Lady is not constitutionally fixed. Nevertheless, many presidents provide, first of all financially, for the activities of the First Lady's office giving her opportunities to implement projects aimed at solving social problems. The office also requires additional expenditures for its numerous staff, including escorting the presidential wife during foreign trips. Abiodun Alao, a well-known Nigerian researcher and director of the African Leadership Center in London points out that 'no constitution in Africa recognizes the office of First Lady. Consequently, there are no formal budgetary allocations for the office. However, over the decades, money scraped from different sources has been allocated to offices of First Ladies to implement projects that have not passed through any approval process' (Alao 2019: 167).

A number of African scholars write about the need to legally secure the institution of the First Lady. They believe that some regulation of the activities of the First Lady's office is vital making it more accountable to the public, as it often works for the taxpayer's money. It could contribute to the continuity of the of the First Lady's projects after her husband's resignation. For example, the South African researchers Jo-Ancie van Wyk and Chidochashe Nyere believe, 'there should be constitutional clarity and accountability on the formal role, powers and functions of First Ladies' (Van Wyk and Nyere 2019b). The opinion of heads' of state wives themselves is interesting. Some insist on granting them a legal status. For example, Mrs. Tandiwe Banda (wife of the President of Zambia in 2008–2011 Rupiah Banda) stated in 2010 that, she '...would like to see the establishment of a formal office of the First Lady with a government budget allocation to support her public work' (Warungu 2010). Mrs. Naglaa Mahmoud, wife of Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi (2012–2013), refused the 'First Lady' title saying that 'all citizens of the country are equal to each other' (Islam News 2012). She preferred to be named 'Um Ahmed' (in translation from Arabic, 'Mother of Ahmed,' her eldest son).

There is a dispute in African society over the formalization of the First Lady's status, primarily because of inevitable expenditures of state budget money on her maintenance. The First Lady's status has been the subject of debates for many years in Nigeria. The initial development of the institute of the First Lady was connected there with the active public position of Mrs. Maryam Babangida, wife of the country's head General Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993). She was one of the first in Africa to practice offline

meetings with other First Ladies unaccompanied by their husbands, and to support some of their initiatives. Mrs. Maryam Abacha, the wife of the next Nigerian ruler, also did not stand aside from public affairs.

The increased activity of the First Ladies of Nigeria, called by some local observers as mentioned above, the 'First Lady Syndrome,' significantly influenced the legitimization of their husbands. In the early 2000s, the First Lady Stella Obasanjo's intense public activity caused a similar wave among wives of government members and provincial governors. Nigerian analyst Jibrin Ibrahim believes that this tendency has influenced the development of political competition in the country (Ibrahim 2004). On the eve of the election in May 2015 presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari stated that, although 'there is no office of the First Lady in the Nigerian constitution, it should be allowed to promote women's roles in governance' (Adamu 2015).

In addition to the economic side of the problem, it has a political dimension. African First Ladies, like their Western counterparts, take part in protocol events, performing a representative function. At the same time, as shown in this article, in some cases they become informal participants of the political process, which is manifested by the nature and degree of their influence on their presidential spouses. Therefore, the consolidation of the legal status of the First Lady would solve the important and urgent issue of her right to intervene into politics.

Some local political analysts believe that the African Union (AU) and other regional organizations should strengthen their advocacy for the recognition of the position of First Lady which would make it possible to clearly define her functions. The codification of African First Ladies is debatable and will take time. But this is happening not only in Africa. In the USA, the term 'First Lady' appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, but only in 1993, when an official amendment to the 'White House Act on the Validation and Employment of Personnel' of 1978 was adopted, did this institution acquire a legal status according to which it is now a White House official (Pear 1993: 1).

The problems and 'pitfalls' of the formation of the First Lady institution are clearly visible in Zambia. As noted above, since the late 1990s all the presidents' wives (Vera and then Regina Chiluba, Maureen Mwanawasa, Tandiwe Banda, Christine Kaseba-Sata) actively participated in the country's public life. Mrs. C. Kaseba-Sata, the wife of President Michael Sata who came to power in 2011, was actively involved in public life from the very start. The opposition and local NGOs often criticized her excessive, in their opinion, activity, arguing that the First Lady had replaced the functions of some ministries and departments. Initially, her office expenses were paid from government funds, which she officially admitted. But in November 2012 the Zambian parliament approved the allocation of 1.5 billion kwacha (national currency) for the needs of the First Lady's office, which was officially reported in the media (LT 2012). According to the information posted on the opposition website www.zambiawatchdog.com, the country's vice-president Guy Lindsay Scott said in a program statement at a parliamentary meeting on the budget that the reason for this was 'the Government's intention to increase transparency and accountability in the management of the First Lady's office support services...' and that 'her personal profit is not expected' (Zambian Watchdog 2012). The opposition MPs objected: Catherine Namugala (Movement for Multiparty Democracy, MMD) said that the First Lady's office was not constitutional; Kalomo Muntanga (United Party for National Development, UPND) even declared that allocating funds to the First Lady's office would make her a politician (Zambian Watchdog

2012). After the announcement of the vote results, the opposition MPs left the parliament hall. The First Lady clearly stated that she was ‘grateful to the government for the recognition of her office’ and that ‘the budget allocation is meant for the members of staff who need to be paid salaries and also for fuel for the vehicles that we use. It is not meant for my salary...’ (LT 2012).

The acting Zambian First Lady E. Lungu is also very active and often compared to her predecessor. The public does not remain indifferent to the issue of the legal status of the president's wife: in December 2019 another event drew attention to it again. In one of the districts of the city of Kitwe (Copperbelt province) a new police station was built and named in honor of the First Lady E. Lungu. The Minister of home affairs Stephen Kampyongo said in his interview on this issue that the First Lady's office is constitutional because it receives funding from the state (LT 2019). MacDonald Chipenzi, Executive Director of the GEARS Initiative Zambia NGO, said that ‘funding being channeled to this Office by government without supporting legal instrument can be described as illegal in itself’ (LT 2019) and asked the interior minister to point out what article of the Constitution of Zambia or an act of parliament had established the First Lady's office. This story had a continuation with a political taint. When Mrs. E. Lungu arrived in Kitwe the same month to inaugurate the police station, the city mayor and vice-chairman of the ruling party's branch, the Patriotic Front (PF) in this province, Christopher Kang'ombe, did not come to meet her together with other members of the local administration. This had serious consequences for him. On February 28, 2020, the chairman of the party branch in the province, Nathan Chanda, said at a briefing that the mayor's behavior ‘had been disrespectful not only to the First Lady but for President of the Republic as well and is tantamount to gross misconduct’ (LT 2020). A decision was also announced to remove the mayor from his party post.

The First Ladies of many African countries come with visits to Russia. Spouses of the leaders of Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritius, Mali, Gabon, Angola, Libya, Niger and the Comoros accompanied their husbands at the first Russia–Africa Summit and Economic Forum which took place on October 23–24, 2019 in Sochi (RIA 2019). The First Ladies whose husbands came to power only recently also join in public activities: Mrs. Ana Afonso Dias Lourenço (Angola), Mrs. Auxillia Mwangwa (Zimbabwe), Mrs. Thsepo Motsepe (South Africa), Mrs. Neo Masisi (Botswana). At the regular session of the Organization of First Ladies of Africa against HIV / AIDS (OAFLA), held as part of the regular summit of the African Union (Addis Ababa, February 9–10, 2020), the wife of the President of Rwanda, Mrs. Jeannette Kagame, said that the First Ladies can contribute to the implementation of the Africa's Development Agenda 2063, advocating for the empowerment of women.

Conclusions

The globalization has significantly influenced the development of the socio-political life in African countries. The emerging institution of the First Lady is gradually becoming a reality of political life. Their extensive public activities in the field of combating HIV / AIDS, solving problems of children and motherhood, *etc.*, protect essentially the interests of voters. Thanks to the development of the media and new means of communication within globalization framework, the functions of the First Ladies have been expanding, and their activities are more fully and openly followed.

Representing their countries at international forums, the African First Ladies speak about common problems that are familiar to all people regardless of their skin color, religion, age or gender.

In the context of political pluralism and an increasing participation of women in politics, the role of the wife of the head of state in Africa has grown significantly, thus the institution of the First Lady is gradually becoming a factor influencing to a certain extent the local political culture in several countries. African women have become more open, and their activities (*e.g.*, their fight against HIV / AIDS and participation in protection of children's rights) are increasingly significant and welcomed by fellow citizens and the international community. They act as unofficial ambassadors of their countries.

The studies of the genesis of the institute of the First Ladies in African countries require a close link between theoretical and empirical analysis. The formation of this institute has so far lasted only for decades (since the 1960s), so its empirical analysis mostly prevails. Generalized concepts are premature, because the countries of the continent differ both by their state structure and by levels of economic development while in some of them an autocratic element has been observed and continues to persist in the nature of their state power.

In Africa, the formation of the First Lady institution while showing clear dynamics is fraught with a number of problems. A close connection and interdependence of this process with the increasing role of women in society are also emerging.

NOTES

¹ In 2016, the English director Amma Asante, whose parents were from Ghana, filmed *A United Kingdom* with Rosamund Pike and David Oyelowo in the lead roles.

² At the Central Documentary Film Studio (CDSF) a documentary was filmed (directed by Sergey Repnikov) about their stay in Moscow, Leningrad, Tbilisi and Kiev. URL: <http://www.net-film.ru/film-7613>.

³ Statement Presented by the Director-General on the Occasion of the Opening Session of the First Summit of Africa First Ladies on Peace and Humanitarian Issues. Abuja-Nigeria, 5–7 May 1997. URL: <http://www.fao.org/DG/afrsumen.HTM>. Accessed April 29, 2020.

⁴ H. E. Denise Nkurunziza, First Lady of the Republic of Burundi. URL: http://denise-nkurunziza.com/?page_id=5. Accessed May 4, 2020.

⁵ Après avoir sillonné les routes et les pistes à travers Madagascar, j'ai beaucoup appris sur mes compatriotes et sur moi-même – <https://association-fitia.com/?lang=en>

⁶ Address by Elizabeth Diouf, Foundation President, on the occasion of the Third Gala Ball of the Elizabeth Diouf Solidarité-Partage Foundation

⁷ Mrs Esther Lungu – First Lady of the Republic of Zambia. URL: https://www.sh.gov.zm/?page_id=5161. Accessed May 3, 2020.

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