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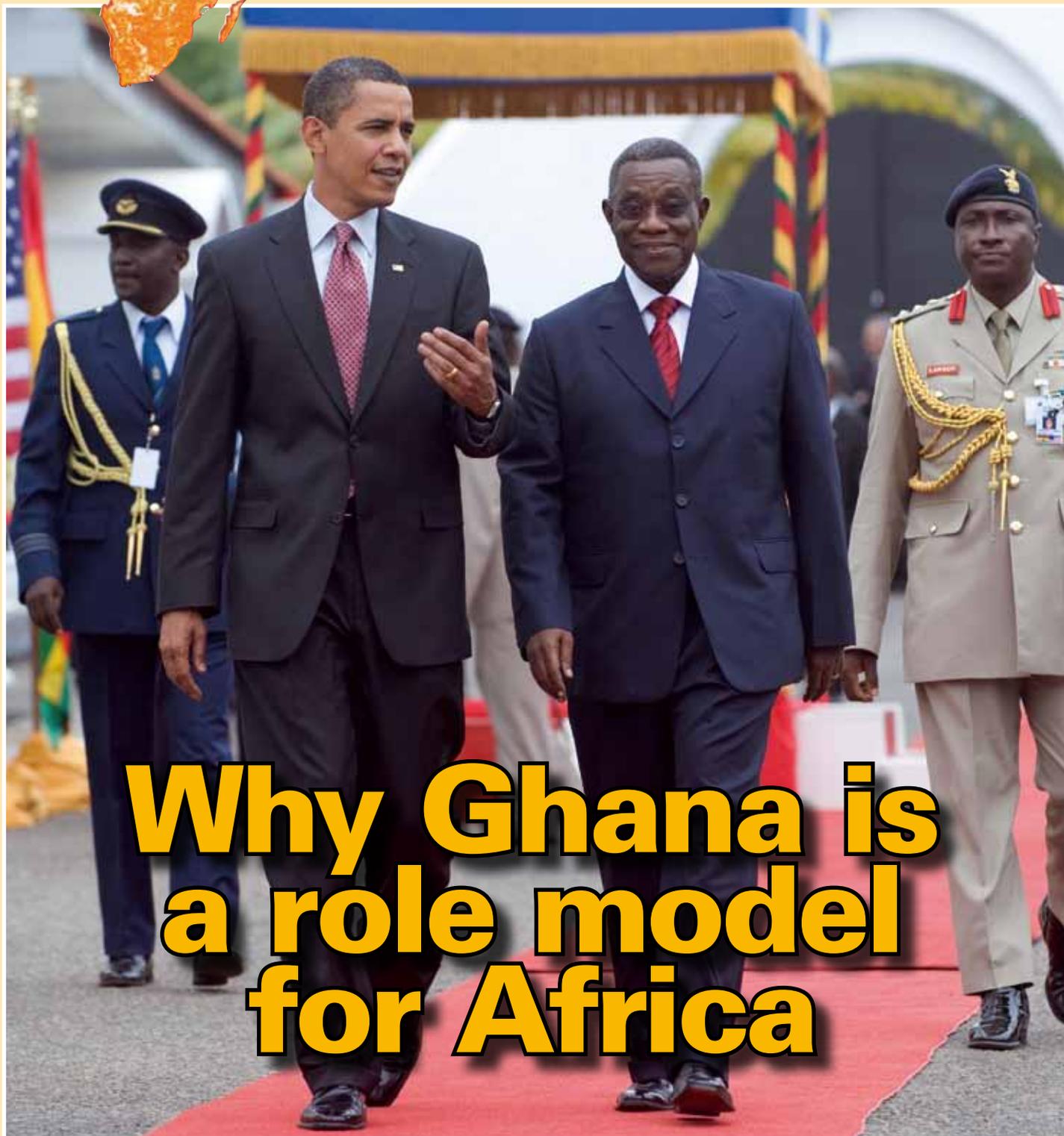
Eritrea unshaken,  
ruling party  
leader assures  
in Frankfurt

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verdict, what  
hopes now for  
**Peace in Sudan?**

August / September 2009 • No. 69 / Vol. 12

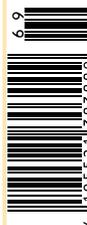
# THE AFRICAN COURIER

www.theafricancourier.de | ISSN 1867-0105 | International Magazine Published in Germany



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# Battle to rename Swiss mountain

## Activists ask towns to drop name of anti-African racist



COURTESY OF HANS FAESSLER

Hans Faessler (left) and Solomon Tshivhula of the Embassy of South Africa in Bern celebrating the renaming of Kruegerstrasse in St Gallen, Switzerland. Paradoxically, the biggest wildlife park in South Africa still bears the name of the Apartheid forerunner

*A campaign is currently going on to rename Agassizhorn, a mountain in the Swiss Alps named after the Swiss scientist Louis Agassiz. However Agassiz was not only a glaciologist, but a racist thinker who believed that Africans were inferior.*

*Leading the campaign is Hans Faessler, founder of the Committee to De-Mount Louis Agassiz, whose efforts have already led a street named after Paul Kruger, the South African racist and forerunner of Apartheid, to be renamed after 23 years of protest.*

*In an exclusive interview with Faessler, the historian, anti-Apartheid activist and fighter for African humanity, explains why it's necessary to rename the mountain and how you can support the noble campaign*

**TAC:** Could you please explain what the campaign about the renaming of Agassizhorn is all about?

Faessler: Agassizhorn is a mountain in the Swiss Alps which was named after the

Swiss scientist Louis Agassiz (1807-1873). Agassiz, however, was not only an influential glaciologist but also an influential racist and a pioneering thinker of Apartheid. To “scientifically prove the inferiority of the Black race”, Agassiz commissioned daguerreotype pictures of African slaves on a South Carolina plantation. One of them was Renty, a slave from the Congo. It is in the honour of this slave that we want to rename the mountain “Rentyhorn”.

**How can members of the public participate in the campaign?**

Congolese slave Renty, whom Louis Agassiz had photographed in order to “scientifically prove the inferiority of the Black race”

Sasha Huber, a Swiss-Haitian artist living in Finland, hired a helicopter, flew to the top of the mountain and drove a plate for Renty into the snow. She has launched a petition where over 2,300 people from all over the world have already expressed their solidarity at the website: [www.rentyhorn.ch](http://www.rentyhorn.ch).

People who want to get in touch with us can reach us via email at: [info@rentyhorn.ch](mailto:info@rentyhorn.ch)

More information on the campaign can also be found at: [www.louverture.ch/AGASSIZ.html](http://www.louverture.ch/AGASSIZ.html)

**You started your activism for Black causes as an anti-Apartheid activist.**

**How did you get into it?**

Being a member of the ideological left in Switzerland in the 1980s, one was quite naturally drawn into the solidarity campaigns to boycott the racist regime in South Africa. As a member of the state legislature (cantonal parliament), I drew up several private member's Bills to have the sale of Krugerrand gold coins banned; as an activist I picketed Swiss banks like UBS and Credit Su-



COURTESY OF HANS FAESSLER

issue to encourage people to withdraw their bank accounts.

**You have successfully fought for the change of a street named after the Apartheid forerunner Paul Kruger. What message do you think that change will convey?**

As in all cases of the “politics of memory”, the debate is just as important as the result. In our campaign to have that street renamed, we have been able – via the media – to hammer home our analysis that Swiss companies and banks were profiteers of that murderous regime and that they must pay reparations to the victims of Apartheid in South Africa. Do not forget that the “Apartheid Reparations Lawsuits” are still continuing in New York under the “Alien Tort Claims Act”.

**Is it not a paradox that while a street named after Kruger in Switzerland has been changed, the largest wild-life park in South Africa still bears his name?**

As I understand, there have been moves in South Africa as well to have that park renamed. But in order to maintain the tourism brand “Kruger Park”, people have settled for a compromise: keep the name, but remove the statue of Kruger. It must be emphasized that our Swiss street was not named after Kruger to honour him as a preserver of African wildlife, but as a “great statesman and a politician”.

**How would you respond to the critics of calls to change the name of Kruger Park who say it would affect its image among tourists in the world?**

I can easily accept the South African compromise I have outlined above. The politics of memory does not aim at erasing from this planet every trace that a controversial political figure has left behind.

**In your book on the Swiss involvement in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, you explained that it is necessary for all European nations to look critically at their role in the heinous crime. Do you think enough has been done to recognize the enormity of the crime committed against Africans by the perpetrators of the trade?**

No. The process of coming to terms with “appalling tragedies in the history of humanity not only because of their abhorrent barbarism but also in terms of their magnitude, organized nature and especially their negation of the essence of the victims,” as the Durban Declaration calls them, has only begun in Europe.

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**Sasha Huber hired a helicopter, flew to the top of the mountain and drove a plate for Renty into the snow, to symbolically rename the mountain after the African slave**

**Do you think African nations are doing enough to keep the memory of these negative historical events alive?**

Within the limited resources that African nations have in terms of universities, research, education, the organization of conferences, the creation and maintenance of

places of memory, etc. a lot has been done already. More can and will be done, but the big challenge to remember is not for the descendants of the African victims but for the descendants of the perpetrators in Europe and the Americas.

**Kwame Appiah**

## Supporting the Rentyhorn campaign

**A**s a result of media pressure, the mayors of Grindwald and Guttannen, the communes bordering the Agassizhorn, have agreed to meet a delegation of the “Committee to De-Mount Louis Agassiz”, led by Hans Faessler and consisting of Sasha Huber, Swiss-Haitian artist; Roger Buangi Pua-ti, historian and Protestant minister with Congolese origins; and Kanyana Mutombo, journalist with Congolese origin and director of the African People’s Universi-

ty in Geneva, as well as a representative of UNESCO.

The “Round Table Meeting” will be held on 5 September 2009 in Grindelwald. “It is possible, especially if we can muster more support through international media coverage, that the mayors will consent to renaming the peak,” said Faessler.

The Committee is calling on members of the public to send letters, postcards or e-mails to the two mayors and the UNESCO representative in order to make the international pressure felt.

To support the campaign, readers may sign the online petition at: [www.rentyhorn.ch](http://www.rentyhorn.ch)



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