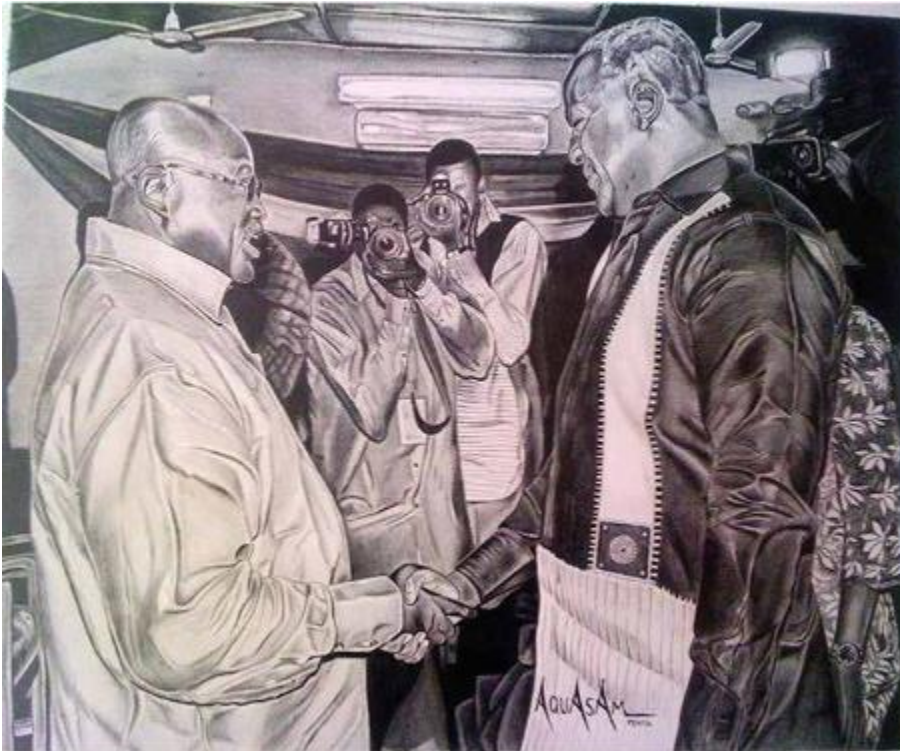


How to be a peacemaker

Art below by award finalist Adwoa Amoah, depicts Ghana's opposing presidential candidates Nana Akufo Addo (left) and John Dramani Mahama shaking hands and chatting at a 2014 news conference.



The Peace Pipe Adwoa Amoah, Courtesy Kuenyehia Prize for Contemporary African Art, 2014

Somebody like me ain't perfect
Somebody like me needs care
In the moment I'm heavy and hurting
Can anybody meet me there?
Can anybody say a prayer
Can anybody light a candle
For someone like me?
- Somebody like me, **Joy Oladokun, 2023.**

“In Springfield, Ohio, these people - the people that have come in – they’re eating the pets, they’re eating the dogs, they’re eating the cats of the residents”...

As this year (2024) ends, almost half of the world’s population are going through (or have gone through) some sort of democratic elections to elect their country leaders. This has been unprecedented in the history of mankind.

With these elections has also been the unprecedented hardening of opinions on each side of the fence.

And this is not only limited to politics.

I have seen this in almost every business, every country - especially in my home countries of the United Kingdom and Ghana.

I have heard names being called, mudslinging on both sides and people (some of who I know personally) suddenly transformed into monsters, spewing out insults, hate and abuse.

There is also the war in Ukraine, the fatal unrest in Gaza, Israel and Lebanon, the recent unrest in Bangladesh, Kenya, France and Germany and the dehumanising of immigrants, the vast majority of who are trying to flee wars and unrest to give themselves and their families a shot at a decent future.

Even in my own quaint, usually peaceful city of Plymouth, England, there was a recent uproar as the far right staged a racially inspired demonstration which nearly turned violent.

Social media has also played a huge part, with algorithms from all the major platforms feeding more and more news on both sides.

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta, which owns WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Threads acknowledged this in an address to the US congress recently:

"We didn't take a broad view enough of our responsibility... it's not enough to just connect people - we have to make sure those connections are positive... it's not enough to just give people a voice, we have to make sure people aren't using it to hurt each other, spread misinformation... across the board, we have a responsibility not just to build tools, but to make sure these tools are used for good".

It's so easy to feel helpless in the midst of all this and people have responded with either burying their heads in the sand in resignation or cynicism or participating in these calcified opinions. But there is a third, and better way.

Engagement.

Engagement is an active way to become a peacemaker in our homes, our communities, our workplaces, our friendships, our relationships, wherever we find ourselves.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby outlined three ways, (which I have also adapted with my own thoughts) how each one of us can achieve this:

1. **Be curious:** I feel the lack of curiosity is one of the biggest obstacles facing our world today and contributes massively to the hardening of opinions of both sides, whether it's to do with politics, policy or power. As the legendary speaker, leadership expert and best-selling author John C Maxwell always says, the mother of all cockups is assumption. We assume we know where the other party stands. We assume we are right, and they are wrong. We assume we have no blind spots. But the truth is, different is not always wrong. A

differing opinion to yours does not make you right and they wrong. I have lost count of the number of times I have been personally humbled and proven wrong on, when I have taken time to swallow my pride and hear the other person out. Genuine curiosity is a trait we all need to practice. But curiosity on its own is not enough...

2. **Be present:** Being present means two things: being physically present with the opposing side, and also being mentally and emotionally present. As a chronic people pleaser, my first instinct is to run away from conflict, to wish it away, bury my head in the sand, pretend it doesn't exist. But being present requires boldness, courage, empathy and action to stay with the other person as they tell their story. Being present does not mean agreement or endorsement, but it does mean we allow the assumptions we hold on so tightly to be challenged by the other party...

3. **Reimagine:** What would a peaceful outcome look like in this situation? How can we respectfully disagree? Reimagining is the art of using your mind to travel beyond the finite confines of the current situation – the supposed impasse, real or imagined - to dream about what would peace in whatever conflict would look like. It means taking a deep breath, not demonising the person before you and knowing that we are all better than the worst thing we have ever done. It is about finding the little thing, the 1% we all agree on, and giving it our best shot.

Sometimes, like in all life's situations we may fail. But I can almost guarantee if we engage any disagreement with these three principles, we will leave with a better understanding, empathy and appreciation of the other side which we never had before.

And maybe, just maybe, we can all do our bit to make this world a more peaceful, harmonious and better place to live in.

We can do better.

- Steven N. Adjei, #1 Best-selling author and business consultant, www.stevenadjei.com, hello@stevenadjei.com