

# WRITERS MOSAIC

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Jason Okundaye

In conversation with Gabriel Gbadamosi

Gabriel Gbadamosi (GG): Jason Okundaye, thank you for coming to speak to me, Gabriel Gbadamosi, for Writers Mosaic.

Jason Okundaye (JO): Thank you very much for having me.

GG: No, it's about this excellent book, *Revolutionary Acts*, with a lovely subtitle, *of Love and Brotherhood in Black Gay Britain*.

JO: Yeah.

GG: And as I, as it came in the door and I thought about it, I thought, "When have I last seen a book about Black gay Britain and then more one that centred on Brixton, where I'm from effectively?"

JO: Yeah.

GG: From Vauxhall, the Oval, but that's Brixton. And I live in Brixton now. So, in order to kind of launch us on this and give people a sense of the book itself, let's try and get a sense of you. Jason, who are you? Where did you grow up? Are you a Brixton boy? What's this?

JO: Who am I? A very existential question for a Friday morning.

GG: Yeah, absolutely.

JO: Well, yeah, I'm Jason Okundaye. I grew up in Battersea, in the kind of Nine Elms area of Battersea, in the estate; so, pre-gentrification Battersea, where the kind of like post- World War II social housing is kind of erected off the Wandsworth Road.

That's where I grew up, which was a... I don't want to get into 'Was it a happy childhood or not?' It was a happy childhood. I had, you know, both my parents and I have, like, really fond memories of growing up, even if things were, you know, financially difficult. It was just the kind of, like, standard, like, black working-class childhood, I'd say.

I was the son of Nigerian immigrants, although my dad was actually born here, but went back to Nigeria when he was about five years old or something like that. But yeah, that's kind of, like, the origin. I'm the middle of three boys. We all

grew up sleeping in the same bedroom because it was, you know, just one of those...

GG: [Interrupts] It's a council flat, yeah.

JO: Yeah. And then when I was 11, I got a scholarship to go to private school in Croydon, as did my siblings as well; which was a bit of a weird experience because when I was in primary school, everyone was poor, so it wasn't really a thing. You didn't have to think about it.

GG: So, no one's poor. Everyone's...

JO: Yeah.

GG: Everyone's there.

JO: Everyone lived in a council estate. We were predominantly black, so you didn't stand out for those reasons. I stood out because I was rubbish at football, and I was quite effeminate as a child, but I didn't stand out, you know, for class reasons. At that time, there were certain private schools, particularly in kind of like South London or moving towards Surrey, who would kind of do outreach at, you know, inner city, working-class primary schools and say, hey, we want your brightest students to come and apply. We've got bursaries, we've got scholarships. Don't worry about the money, you know, try and come here.

And obviously my older brother went before me. And there was also this sense that, you know, schools locally wouldn't be good enough for, like, these bright boys; and there was this idea that, you know, some of these schools were unsafe or dangerous. And obviously at the time it was a bit of a mark of honour, it was like, oh, well, you know, you were smart enough to pass these exams and you as a kind of, like, really special eleven-year-old were going to have this great educational opportunity.

And as I kind of got there and as I got older, I started to assess it and I started to think, I feel really out of place here. But also, I miss my friends from... [indeterminable] at home, and also, I don't like the fact that just because I was like good at passing exams as an eleven-year-old... I have conversations about it with my mum sometimes and you know I don't blame her. Like obviously, people want to do the best that they can for their children and things like that and it's not even necessarily just I can't say confidently, 'Oh, I wish I didn't go there,' because I don't know what my life might have looked like had I gone to a different school.

I think I've always tried to remember where I come from. I mean, I still live there now because I, you know, moved back home last year. Going to that kind of school didn't necessarily instantly mean that I kind of like transcended my class or moved up to another bracket. But I guess it did equip me with certain, you

know, intellectual capabilities and exposures to different kinds of art and literature and all those things that I could have got in a different capacity in the state school as well. My dad would always talk to us about, you know, what are the kind of like Nigerian literature that he grew up reading and take us to libraries and take us to museums and things like that. So, I really feel like my upbringing, I was always kind of shaped to be someone who was literary and considering words and their impact, even if I wasn't always conscious of that; because I actually didn't realize I wanted to be a writer until I was already in a job that I hated. So, when I left university, I kind of just got, took the first job that I got. When I was in my final year, I didn't want to pay too much attention to job applications. So, I did one, got it, and was like, 'That'll do.'

And that was the civil service fast stream. Big mistake. The civil service is a solid pension, it's a solid job; it's very hard to get fired from. Trust me, I tried to get fired from that job many times, until I finally just had to quit. But it wasn't for me; it was very dull work. I saw myself becoming a kind of writer journalist, but I didn't have a very clear sense of what I wanted that to be.

Because for me, writing had always been a hobby or something I'd done on the side. If I felt really passionately about something, I would just start writing. Or if I'd watched a TV show that I had a lot of opinions about, I would just start

writing. And for me, writing has always been something which is incredibly intuitive. I haven't necessarily set out to be any one kind of writer.

GG: What I was quite impressed about in this book was where you kind of touch on the idea that maybe black, gay culture in Britain can be a bit conservative.

JO: Yeah.

GG: Can be really of the Right. And you need to kind of watch out for that. So you, you are basically alert in your work to the political implications of what you do.

JO: Mm-hmm.

GG: Let's get onto this book. It's a groundbreaking book; it's an important book. Can you give me a sense of how you first encountered black, gay, Brixton?

JO: Well, I have to go back to university and to my first year of university when I was really struggling. And I came across this film called *Tongues Untied* by Marlon Briggs.

And that's actually an African American film which looks at African American gay men and their culture. And I watched it, and I remember crying and I remember

thinking that this film is going to be very important to me. And I couldn't really put into words exactly why it was so much... it wasn't just seeing and kind of seeing myself reflected; there was also something in the kind of voice and in the kind of like tapestry of culture and politics that I thought, 'This really speaks to me as a project.' Fast forward to my kind of like final year of university, inspired by this film, I kind of said I really want to look at black gay subjectivities in the context of Brixton.

And I decided that I was going to do that by looking at HIV and AIDS for my thesis. And I remember doing a lot of online research and being like, well, I cannot find anything, or I cannot find like substantial literature about black gay Britain. If I was finding things, all I was finding was like articles about like race and racism and they were all like, 'I've been on Grindr and a white man didn't reply to me.' And I was like, 'Well, this has got nothing to do with anything.' But I did find the name, Mark Thompson, who is now a great friend of mine who was a kind of like a sexual health activist and someone who...

GG: [Interrupts] A great figure in this book.

JO: Yeah, and who'd been working in that sector for decades and had been diagnosed HIV positive when he was a teenager.

So I thought, 'Brilliant. This is someone who I need to be speaking to.' And he gave me like a lot of information, a lot of context in my dissertation. But we also really became friends; we really got along with each other. I remember him being a bit unsure of me when he first met me because he thought that I was a bit posh.

GG: Yeah.

JO: Because of the way I spoke and the university I was emailing him from. And then he realized like, oh no, you are a black boy from this background just like I am. After the kind of like dissertation process concluded, we stayed in touch and we stayed friends and obviously he lived in Brixton and he'd be telling me, you know, little anecdotes about his life.

And I remember him saying that the house that he lived in, in Brixton used to be where Rotimi Fani-Kayode lived, who was a Nigerian gay artist and who died of AIDS related complications, I think, late 1980s.

GG: It's suggested that he died of AIDS related complications, but we don't actually know.

JO: Yeah. And so I became very interested in that. And I was like, you know, is there a reason for that? Like, is there a history here? And then he said, 'Well, there is. I don't know it that well, but you can speak to this guy called Dirg

Aab-Richards, who knows a lot about this.' So, it became... I did sociology for my undergrad. So, we call this snowball sampling where you get one person and they kind of recommend other people for you to speak to.

GG: You've divided the book into two sections. The first section is around activists and activism, and that's literally how you've come across a community, a scene of Black British gay men. The second half is called, for short, it's called Whores.

JO: Yeah.

GG: Activists and Whores. And this is much more their private cascading lives and experiences of emotional relationships. Let's stay initially with the activism and the activists.

JO: Yeah.

GG: How would you... how would you lay out for people listening before they get hold of this book, the kinds of activism and activists that you found?

JO: I found activists who were, for the first time in kind of like British history, were organizing as black gay men. And I mean that in the sense that they weren't purely organizing as black activists or as gay activists, but they were coming from these separate movements and coming together and saying, like,

we need to form a mass which is, you know, centred on us and which is specifically about us.

The problematics of that had always been that each issue for each side had been seen as a distraction or something which was an irrelevance or something that people didn't want to go into. For example, Ted Brown, who was in the Gay Liberation Front, he was often finding that whenever he wanted to platform issues of race or confront them for their treatment and attitudes towards black men, this was something which was often marginalized and kind of stepped over and he wasn't finding as much solidarity as he would have expected within a minority group.

GG: There were a number of fantastic scenes in which, for example, at the gay pride kind of demonstrations and marches, people within the march, the demonstration sort of go up to black men and say, 'You don't look gay.' How are they being negotiated?

JO: The activists are kind of refusing to negotiate them. They're saying that, you know, we are complete people. We're not cleaved between two identities; we're one complete thing. This is something which is always going to, you know, show up whenever we show up.

And I thought that that was incredibly moving and inspirational. And what I thought was really key was that none of these men were having a crisis about themselves. None of these men were saying, you know, I don't feel like I can be both of these things, or I feel wrong for being both of these things.

All of these men were saying, I'm very proud to be who I am, but society makes my life unliveable for certain reasons, or I'm reading the black press and I'm finding all of this, you know, homophobic sentiment, which is prioritized, even though we know that the entire black community is not homophobic. So, I think that these men kind of found that they were in a really unique position. And in that space, they cause so much mischief and so much trouble in the best possible way.

GG: Let's go to an issue that arises in the book around the coverage by *The Voice* newspaper, which was for some decades, the voice of Black Britain in a popular tabloid sort of style and was published out of Brixton. Their coverage of the death of the footballer, Justin Fashanu, was reprehensible. Talk about the reaction of the black gay activists as to that, what they did.

JO: So, what I write about specifically about the moment of his coming out rather than his death, because the reaction from his brother, John Fashanu, was kind of given like front page prominence: this idea of, you know, like my gay brother is an outcast. And the activists pretty much responded immediately. And

what they did was they took their knowledge that they had from being within the trade union movement or being within the Gay Liberation Front and said, you know, this is how we can organize a boycott of *The Voice* newspaper. So, when Ted Brown, you know, first found the newspaper, he literally went down to *The Voice* offices wanting a confrontation but was denied that. Instead because he was a local government worker, as part of the kind of national association of local government officers, he basically tabled an amendment for local government advertisers to pull the advertising from *The Voice* until they implement, you know, an equality policy; until they retract these articles that they had been making.

And not just about Justin Fashanu, but about other suspected gay celebrities the activists were finding. So, between Ted Brown and Dirg Aab-Richards and Alex Owolade as well.

GG: All of these good, very prominent sort of activists and organizers.

JO: Yeah. They were finding that, you know, they were getting a lot of support from the black community and not just from black gay people. So, they were having people writing in saying, yes, we think this kind of coverage is a disgrace and we're really proud of Justin and the fact that he's been out in the open and you know, he is a superstar to us still, like he was the first black football player to

be sold for a million pounds. But of course there were also responses [which] were saying, you know, 'Why are you trying to destroy a black newspaper?'

Some people weren't able to distinguish between black activists trying to get accountability from a newspaper and say, white racists who would want to shut down the newspaper for, you know, nefarious reasons. So, that became something which was, you know, difficult to tread and to manage; but in that situation, what can you do but go on? You know that what you're doing is right.

GG: You articulate lots of things around what's going on here, and it's a process, and you uncover it very well in your descriptions in the book. I want to go to a particular kind of element of gay life in Brixton, which is communal living.

JO: Yeah.

GG: The commune. Now, within Railton Road, which used to be known as the front line, and was the focus of the 1981 riots, there was a gay commune created and occupied by a grouping of white gay men known as the Brixton Faeries.

JO: Yeah.

GG: It was great. It was so progressive. It was an extension of the 60s. The collaboration of a black community giving space and giving protection to other groups is a fantastic kind of model.

JO: Yeah.

GG: But it didn't occur to me at the time. Where were the black gay men in there?

JO: Yeah.

GG: Could you untie that for me? What was going on there?

JO: Yeah. So, what it was, was that, you know, the Faeries or this kind of offshoot of the South London Gay Liberation Front, they were able to be kind of like out and open and demonstrate in the way that, you know, black gay men who were living in Brixton weren't necessarily as comfortable with doing. So, a lot of the time, if they were going to, you know, house parties, these would have like secret codes and there would be a kind of culture of like secrecy and discretion.

So, even if people had like public encounters, it wouldn't be the same as literally holding up a placard saying, 'I am gay' and kind of going around because, you know, your church is there and your grandmother lives there, and all of these

boys you knew at school are there. So, there was a very kind of different risk associated with that.

So, what... so a guy called Dirg Aab-Richards, who was getting to know people from the Brixton Faeries, and he basically got to know the fact that they were these squads on the Railton Road and also the Mail Road in Brixton as well. And he kind of came there and he said, well, there are no black people here, even though this is in a black community, and this is almost like a kind of segregation in a way.

GG: [Interrupts] There's a black community that gives it shelter.

JO: Yeah, yeah. So, what he did was he moved into one of the homes and then he started inviting other, you know, black gay people around Brixton to come and move into the homes as well until they kind of like established like their own spaces within these communes.

It meant people started to eventually be more out in the open. So, parties used to take place at night, of course, but eventually people became more confident to hold hands with their partner going through Brixton Market or something like that. But what people were finding was that, you know, there wasn't necessarily like a change in risk, and they weren't necessarily being confronted with like serious dangers in the way that might be assumed.

GG: We're going to get on to the second part of your book about the kind of the actual lives of, of these men, though it's threaded all the way through the book.

JO: Yeah.

GG: But there's just a particular thing that Transport for London at Brixton Tube commissioned an artwork, one of those kind of circular sort of...

JO: A roundel.

GG: [continuation]... plaques. A roundel which is a photograph by a black, Brixton-based gay artist called Ajamu, which shows two black men kissing.

JO: Yeah.

GG: And it's got this kind of legend, this caption, that 'black men loving black men is a revolutionary act.'

JO: Yeah.

GG: Which is basically the title of your book...

JO: Yeah.

GG: [continuation] ...and how things go in. In talking about black love, you're talking about the love that people bear for each other and your love for the many men that you interview in this book; it's very plain, it's very clear. It's, it's the pleasure of reading the book. But within that, you say, well, people are growing communities in the form of networks and lineages. That word 'lineages' jumped out at me. What do you mean about this, this, these lineages of black men?

JO: So, what I mean by these lineages of black men, I mean the kind of like intergenerations that we have with each other.

GG: Intergenerational?

JO: Yeah. So, the kind of friendships which are formed between myself and like the men who are older than me are friendships that they themselves might have formed with, you know, people who are older than them as well. So, a lot of these men talk about black gay men who came before them, who are of a different generation, which was even more on the ground, and much less out; and the kind of, like, lessons that they had learned from them, and the kind of, like... also the kind of like initiation and integration into Black gay community, which they had from accessing them as well.

So, there is that lineage. And even at the kind of like outset of the book, you know, I talk about the story of Ivor Cummings and Ivor Cummings was a kind of like, Black Sierra Leonean man who was like, basically incredibly important in facilitating Windrush migrants and getting their kind of like resettlement in Clapham and into Brixton as well.

And what's fascinating about this is he was also a black, gay man. So, you can imagine that he had some kind of... In that period, there were also other black gay men and it's known that he was in a kind of artistic community with them too. And those stories and the kind of texture of that is, is lost, but it does show that there is like a heritage there and there is something which people are going back to as well.

GG: I love it because what it's saying is that culture is passed on generationally, and that culture, the culture of love, the culture of loving, is something that you can get directly from these networks and lineages. But you pair that with literature.

JO: Yeah.

GG: With arts, the arts, as though initially many black gay men in Britain were looking to Langston Hughes, were looking to Essex Hemphill, I think his name is. African American writers.

JO: Yeah.

GG: Talking about love and the experience of loving. But together these two things - an African American artistic tradition, plus also a kind of learned culture through lineages, together, are somehow in dialogue forming. Is that right?

JO: That is, that is definitely right. And it's really integral to these men kind of like building their identity.

So, it was [indeterminable], it was also James Baldwin and people like that. And you know, encountering these texts and starting to understand something more about yourself, I guess, in the same way as when I first watched *Tongues Untied*, I started to understand more about myself as well by mere connection.

One thing I would push back on there is that the kind of narrative of black love is really dominant throughout this text, but also black sex is also something which is still incredibly important too; particularly in the final chapter, but all the way through the book where the men talk about, you know, their desire and their kind of like lust for other men and type of sex that they had and the type of sex that they enjoyed as well.

And I thought that was incredibly important because, you know, this is also where I kind of like, play on some of the disagreements with the men and talk about the fact that, you know, some people's mentalities are more liberal and

more conservative than others. Some people might see, you know, a kind of focus on sex amongst black gay men as something which is, you know, not necessarily corrupting, but something which gives an incomplete perspective.

Also, some people will say, well, actually sex is important, and sex is a side of, like, kind of, like, desire and communication, and of our real deep wants is an important thing and this is also something which should be prioritized and should not be shied away from. So, when I wrote this book, I wasn't shy to not only the sex that the men were having, but also even the attractions which are being experienced in real time as well.

GG: Is there a sense in which in me being able to read that or in any reader coming to read that, that we're dominated by kind of pornographic images of male sex and sexuality in ways that kind of obscure that great spectrum?

JO: It's an interesting question. I think that readers will always come to this book as with any book, with their own biases, right?

And with their own kind of own experiences which have informed them. Some people who have read this book or will read this book have had no kind of experience with anything, any kind of black gay media whatsoever; so will have no idea. They've not watched either pornography or they've not seen *Moonlight*, or they've not read any James Baldwin; so this is their first kind of exposure. And

there are some people who will come with, you know, all of these inbuilt experiences and kind of read into this book, you know, what they personally either are looking to find or what they find, you know, most relatable and most thrilling. So, some people will actually, and I don't think this is necessarily them being overbiased by pornography, but some people will be really interested in the sex.

And the reason for that is, you know, sex has to do with, you know, sex at a time where you're post-decriminalization, but there is still such inherent risk in this activity because of, you know, the kind of lethality of HIV and AIDS at this time, and also just, you know, the difficulties of discretion and the kind of spaces where you're having this sex as well.

That in itself is a kind of really interesting history to trace. And then of course, as you say, there are also like the breakfast clubs and walking groups and the black, gay and lesbian centres and things which are, you know, more about bringing a community together. And that community is also, you know, in dialogue as well with like black lesbians too in this period as well.

So, yeah, I think all readers will always, you know, always find different things that they kind of zone in on or they feel more resonant with. And what some people have told me because the book is like nearly a year old now, some people have told me that they really got along or really liked one person in the

book and really felt that they were into them. And some people thought, 'I read this person in the book', they'll refer to them as a character and they'll be like, 'I didn't actually get along with this person or I didn't like their perspective. I just didn't really agree with what they said.' And I wanted that. I wanted to kind of represent these men completely in their own words and in their complexities as well; and to show that full range of not just these experiences that they were having and not just, you know, these kind of like different ways of loving, but also in their difficulties.

So, sometimes if someone had a bit of a difficult personality, I tried to get that across. If someone was a bit snippy, I tried to get that across. If someone had like a kind of viewpoint, which is a bit more conservative, I tried to get that across as well.

GG: Now you certainly got across the personalities of each of the men that you are dealing with. Let me take you to the last person you deal with.

JO: Yeah.

GG: The rather provocative Brixton artist, Ajamu.

JO: Yeah.

GG: It's through this artist and his kind of absolute kind of forwarding of what he calls kind of perverted sex...

JO: Yeah.

GG: [continuation]... as a way of shaking up other black gay men and their normative or normalizing kind of standards to say, actually you're forming a conservative culture in which black men are telling other black men what they can and cannot do and who they can and cannot be.

JO: Yeah.

GG: Is that a real and steady challenge to black gay life?

JO: I'd say so, yeah. There are still attitudes that, you know, oh, there are certain things that we as black men don't do. So, when Ajamu kind of talks about the kind of kink and fetish and sexual behaviour that he is into and that other men around him are into, he talks about the kind of stigma which that carried and I do think that is a stigma which is still carried.

I mean, if you were to say that you went cruising or you were at a sauna or something like that, there is still sometimes an attitude of like, oh, well, like, you know, why would you be doing that with your body, or, you know, how can you

sleep with this many men or whatever? Yeah, I think those kinds of conservative attitudes will always like be consistent and prevail as well.

GG: Okay. Now, the last kind of slight raft of questions I had around the book, which is that you point out that being in the closet, being forced underground, having a divided life in which you can't kind of fully express yourself can be very dangerous; dangerous for you, for your health, for your mental health and your physical health, your epidemiological health.

These are real clear and present dangers. And so, there is an element of the book which says everybody step out of the closet and into sunlight and be safe. And I think that's absolutely right. But there was one thing that I kind of noticed because my own friends and family in gay relationships are very often in black and white relationships. This book is about black men loving black men.

JO: Yeah.

GG: And not the other way around. And in fact, you highlight some of the problems of encountering racism within the wider white gay world. Is there anything beyond the book that you would find yourself able to say to me now about what it is that my brother, for example, is married to a white man? Is that a problem? Is he running away from his own, from his own identity as a black man to be with a white man or?

JO: I wouldn't say that, and I don't think it would be fair for me to comment on other people's relationships or other people to do that. At the same time, I mean, I, my partner is black and Nigerian as well, and that's just, for me, that's not like... sometimes people are like, 'Oh, is this like a political statement?'

I'm like, 'No. It's just what I prefer.' And I think people will have those preferences and those preferences will always be informed by society, right? So, even if you're with a black partner, maybe all of your black partners are light-skinned or they're always mixed-race or something like that. And that...

GG: [Interrupts] And that's your preference. That's what you like.

JO: Yeah. But that, you know, is informed by certain biases.

GG: Is there another book that needs to be written about the fact that we as British people are in a society with so many different other ethnicities and cultures? And how do black gay men negotiate their relationships with other cultures, ethnicities and so on?

JO: I think the kind of like interracial question is something which is always going to be quite provocative and quite sensitive. Some people don't want to be kind of like challenged on it, which I suppose is fair because, you know, they think, well, I'm with who I love and I'm with who I found. And that is totally fair.

At the same time, there is a reason why it's such a pressing issue, like, not just in the Black gay community, but broadly in the Black community as well. I remember I was having a conversation, because I work at *The Guardian* now, I was having a conversation with Joseph Harker, who's worked there for many years, but before then was at *The Voice*.

And he was telling me that, you know, one of the number one issues that people would write in about, the number one issue, was about interracial relationships, and this was back in like the 80s, 90s. He was like, they were just like, this was just such a big issue. And even within the book, some of the men express their opinions.

So, some of the men say, 'I could not be in an interracial partnership because I don't want to have to negotiate race and racism in my relationship.' Or some of them say, 'I just simply am more infatuated with a black man [indeterminable], and I could never have that experience with a white man or an Asian man or anything like that.'

And I think that every individual is going to have, you know, their own experience and their own preference and their own reasons for their preferences. But I do think, of course, this issue can be problematized and politicized.

GG: What is the future of black, gay men, the, the networks, the lineages, the political journey and discoveries and strengths going forward?

JO: We're a much bigger community. There's much, so many more of us, or at least so many more of us that are out and open. I remember going to a black gay club night, maybe a year ago or two years ago, and I remember being like, 'Everyone here is so fucking young.' And I'm, I would have been like 25 then, but I remember there's been so many 18- and 19-year-olds.

And I was like, but I was like, 'This is great.' At the same time, I'm leaving because it's a bit too young for me, but I was also like, 'This is great.' Because when I was that age, it was a much smaller... So this community is expanding and expanding and expanding.

GG: And the village becomes a city.

JO: Yeah, yeah, exactly that. And these guys in the book spoke about the fact that they felt like it's big compared to their day. And I even feel like it's big compared to my day, now as well. So, I think that that size is going to be a real force. And out of that, I really hope that we get like more cultural output as well. So like, I don't want... I've written this book, and I can't think of like... there's fictional books about black gay men, by Mendez and Okechukwu Nzelu and things like that.

But there isn't, I mean, I haven't read like a non-fiction to do with like black gay men in this same kind of way. I hope that people create TV shows and write more stories and that there is bigger cultural output, and people are able to do this; and also that it's seen as viable, right?

Mr. Loverman from Bernadine Evaristo, you know, just broadcast on the BBC and that, you know, specifically about like two black gay men who are in their seventies having a relationship; and the idea that that kind of story can be on primetime BBC television, you know, in a good slot on BBC television as well, is really incredible.

And obviously, [Bernadine] Evaristo is a force and is such a popular author, but at the same time, that kind of story just 10 years ago would not have been seen as commercially viable and wouldn't, simply would not have been made. And we know it wouldn't have because the kind of like rights for Mr. Loverman expired because it wasn't made for such a long time; like that book came out like over 10 years ago. So, I think that we are in a kind of creative moment where the possibilities are more endless.

GG: The reason I asked that question at the end is because as I look at it, I think all the way through the book, you're describing moments when the black gay community has kind of organized to confront, for example, gay pride.

JO: Yeah.

GG: And establish that they can have a presence and not be told, 'You don't look gay.'

JO: Yeah.

GG: But that as soon as they set up a tent with black music and black culture, it gets overrun. All the white people want to come there.

JO: Yeah.

GG: It's a very attractive thing, black culture. Are you somehow kind of trying to protect yourselves from your popularity being overrun? Is there an issue there?

JO: There is that issue that I'd say... I'd say, you know, sometimes people go to say, 'Black Pride' and they say, I feel like this is becoming too... well, they might say, like, the numbers are starting to get off, basically. And I actually haven't been to Black Pride in a few years, not for any, like, specific reason, I just haven't been. Like, and, yeah, I think that that complaint is something which is recurring. I don't know what the kind of solution to that is because the Equality Act says you can't turn anyone away.

GG: Well, Jason Okundaye, thank you for speaking to *Writers Mosaic* about your extraordinary book, *Revolutionary Acts: Love and Brotherhood in Black Gay Britain*.

JO: Thank you.

GG: It should be on many people's shelves.

JO: Thank you very much. Thank you.

A recording of this transcript can be found at [writersmosaic.org.uk](http://writersmosaic.org.uk)

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