

Reasons Why the Protagonists in Naipaul's *In a Free State* Cannot Obtain True Freedom

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V. S. Naipaul is a famous contemporary Indian writer in Britain. His works have inspired many scholars to study and discuss. Naipaul's *In a Free State* has also triggered many scholars' research and discussion. Many scholars' researches on this book mainly focus on aspects like heterogeneous culture, identity crisis, autobiographical writing, and freedom. Few scholars pay attention to reasons why the protagonists in the book cannot get freedom. Although Santos finally gained the status of American citizen, his spirit remained in prison. The narrator of the David Brothers worked hard to earn money for his brother's study. He did not live for himself all his life. So, when he was finally unable to make money, he also lost his spiritual support and could not really gain freedom. As for Bobby, all his kindness and help to Africans are just to avoid being excluded in Africa, so as to better satisfy his desire. Such utilitarian purpose will not be appreciated by Africans. Even if Bobby can survive as a white man in Africa, it is only invalid freedom.

Keywords: V. S. Naipaul, freedom, spiritual shackle, marginalized people

Introduction

V. S. Naipaul is a famous contemporary Indian American writer in Britain. In 2001, he won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Together with Ishiguro and Rushdie, they were known as the "Three Immigrant Writers in British Literature". Naipaul devoted his entire life to writing without embellishment. He created over 30 works throughout his life, which can be divided into Trinidad themes, travelogue themes, and autobiographical themes. *The Mystic Masseur* published in 1957, *Miguel Street* and *The Suffrage of Elvira* published in 1959, and *A House for Mr. Biswas* published in 1961 are all set in Trinidad. After 1961, Naipaul began his trip to the Caribbean Islands. During this period, he created famous works, such as *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion*, *The Mimic Men*, *Guerrillas*, *A Bend in the River*, and *In a Free State*. After 1984, Naipaul began to pay more attention to himself. The works of this period are more or less autobiographical in color. Works, such as *The Enigma of Arrival*, *Half a Life*, and *Magic Seeds* are representative works.

Naipaul's complex birth and life experiences have endowed many of his works with unique perspectives and meanings, and have also sparked strong research interest among scholars at home and abroad. American writer Theroux Paul published *V. S. Naipaul: An Introduction to His Work* in 1972, marking the beginning of academic research on Naipaul. In their article published in 2021, Louise Postma and Robert John Balfour explored the internalization of common thematic spatial relationships in Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and Ethan

Adams' *Red Poppy*, and analyzed the potential for interdisciplinary research in these two works (Postma & John Balfour, 2021). Zeng Kui conducted an analysis and research on Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*. He believes that the novel expresses the discourse of Thatcher's rural heritage and nostalgic postcolonial criticism (Zeng, 2021). Jasmine Anand focused on Naipaul's Indian trilogy. In her book published in 2018, she analyzed the potential for dialogue in self, culture, and history in Naipaul's *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (Anand, 2018).

In addition, some scholars have chosen to study Naipaul's travelogue *In a Free State*. Yang Mengwei (2022) analyzed the cultural transfer of Santos in *In a Free State* and the identity crisis caused by immigrants living in heterogeneous cultures. Hou Linqing (2021) analyzed the image of the Indian other living in a heterogeneous cultural society, as well as the image of the Habshe and African black ethnic groups. These images indicate the change in cultural attitudes of Naipaul in these two sets of oppositions, and ultimately the realization of identity transformation in the Indian Western African triangular relationship, showcasing his cosmopolitan writing tendency. Tang Siqi (2019) believed that Naipaul made a double critique in *In a Free State*, and this attitude is closely related to his mixed identity. However, Li Yi (2013) believed that in Naipaul's works, freedom is not only a psychological state of modern people's instability, homelessness, disorientation, and increasing alienation from their familiar environment, but also a disorderly and chaotic social state in African countries after political independence. It is undeniable that the book *Free Kingdom* has some autobiographical elements to some extent, and the storyline also implies Naipaul's own experiences to some extent. And this autobiographical writing is not only about self-attention, but more importantly, it is a way of facing history and exploring the true existence (Liao, 2021).

After summary and analysis, it can be found that scholars' researches on *In a Free State* mostly focus on aspects like heterogeneous cultures, identity crises, autobiographical writing, and freedom. They all believe that the protagonists cannot find their identity in a foreign country, leading to an identity crisis and ultimately failing to gain true freedom. However, few scholars have noticed why these protagonists cannot obtain freedom. Therefore, based on the inheritance of previous research results, this article further analyzes the reasons why the protagonists are unable to obtain freedom. The article is divided into three parts, analyzing the reasons for the protagonist's loss of freedom in the three stories in *In a Free State*. Although Santos ultimately gained the status of an American citizen, that is, physical freedom, his spirit remained imprisoned. He had lived for his boss before, and after gaining his identity, he did not live for himself. The David brothers worked hard to earn money for their younger brother's education, and blindly imitated them in order to integrate into the American environment. They do not live for themselves in the new environment, so when they are ultimately unable to make money and fail to integrate, they also lose their spiritual support and cannot truly obtain freedom. As for Bobby, all his kindness and assistance to Africans are nothing more than to avoid being excluded in Africa and better satisfy his desires. This utilitarian purpose will certainly not be appreciated by Africans, so even if Bobby can survive as a white person in Africa, it is only ineffective freedom.

Santos: Spiritual Confinement With Physical Freedom

"One out of Many" is the second short story in *In a Free State*. The story is set in the United States and tells the story of the protagonist Santos following his employer to make a living in Washington, D.C. Before Washington, Santos had almost no freedom, and he did not even know what freedom was because he had been living for his employer. He never considered himself in his ideology. He is respected, has a position, and works for an important person. The top local figures have come to his employer's apartment building, eaten the food he

cooked, and praised him greatly (Naipaul, 2019). Santos is very proud to work for an important person, and he is respected because his employer is respected. When he learned that his employer could take him to Washington, Santos organized two boxes for his employer, but he only wrapped his own things in a few pieces of old cotton cloth (Naipaul, 2019). In his subconscious, the employer was always more important than himself, so he would carefully and seriously pack his things for the employer to go to Washington, while for himself, Santos basically did not consider it carefully. There was only something wrapped in a few pieces of old cotton cloth, and not even a decent box prepared for oneself. It can be seen that during his time as a chef in Mumbai, Santos only regarded himself as an accessory of his employer, considering everything for his employer.

In the following Washington years, Santos initially felt lost and confused. After sitting comfortably, he looked around and looked for someone who looked similar to him, but no one, whether Indian or foreign, was like him as a domestic servant (Naipaul, 2019). Santos had never left Mumbai before and had never taken a plane, so he felt very confused. He thought that people from the outside world were just like him, being used and working for others. But the actual situation is not like this. After arriving at the residence, Santos was given a closet. He thinks he will live comfortably here. Compared to the pigeonhole like closet he lived in Mumbai, it is much more spacious here. Moreover, the top of this closet is still flat, so he will not bump his head (Naipaul, 2019). He didn't dislike the poor environment of the closet, and even thought it was very good. From this, it can be seen that after arriving in Washington, Santos still did not begin to develop self-awareness, and he still felt that he was a part of the employer and a thoughtless servant.

After a period of time, Santos became accustomed to life in the United States and began to gradually awaken. In the past, his employer was everything to him. Santosh once told him that he was just dust in front of him. However, now he no longer sees himself as a dependent existence on his employer, although this discovery is not made out of his own intention (Naipaul, 2019). He no longer sees himself as an accessory to his employer, but gradually begins to face himself. When he looked in the mirror, he noticed his handsome face and began to consciously dress up. Later, in order to gain more and more complete freedom, he chose to flee his employer and found a new job. But at this moment, although Santos seemed to have gained more freedom than before, he was actually trapped in his own mental unease and imprisonment. This pathological state is even worse than being confined to the original residence, because now he has to take responsibility and take full responsibility (Naipaul, 2019). He began to become anxious because he was afraid of being caught back by his previous employer, and he was afraid of being told by his new employer about the fact of escape and illegal identity. Although he had a brand new life, Santos' spirit still remained in an unfree state. This spiritual confinement kept Santos living in unease and fear after gaining freedom. He gained physical freedom, but never spiritual freedom. So, even if he ultimately obtained legal American citizenship by marrying a Habsheer woman, he knew clearly that he would never be free. After gaining freedom, he only realized one thing: He has a face and a body, and he must feed this body and clothe it, year after year, until it dies (Naipaul, 2019). Spiritually, it seems that there is always a force that imprisons Santos, allowing him to live in torment and emptiness even after obtaining American citizenship. Because of this spiritual confinement, Santos can never live for himself, and therefore cannot obtain true freedom.

David Brothers: The Collapse of Freedom During Pursuing Dreams

In the story "Tell Me Who to Kill", the narrator is the older brother of the David brothers. David is the younger brother. They come from the West Indies. The David brothers lived in impoverished families, and their ancestors had been farmers for generations. The barrenness of life made the David brothers determined to change

their fate, especially the narrator. He made up his mind to work hard to earn money for his younger brother to study abroad and live a better life. In fact, since childhood, the narrator has been living for his younger brother without truly considering himself. When his younger brother suffers from malaria and falls ill with a fever, the narrator will be very remorseful. The narrator does not think that his younger brother's malaria is due to environmental or dietary hygiene issues, but rather thinks that his younger brother is so beautiful but has malaria. And it's very wrong for him to be so rough and yet still strong. The narrator's inferiority and belittling of himself, as well as his love and care for his younger brother, fully demonstrate the humbleness and insignificance of his self-existence consciousness in his thoughts. He has been thinking about his younger brother, and this kind of care has even reached a pathological level. He always feels that if someone harms his younger brother, he will go kill him. He does not care about himself, because he does not have a life (Naipaul, 2019). Later, in order to send his younger brother to British university, the narrator would go around borrowing money, signing all kinds of documents, until all the money is collected. He has no life. The only purpose of living is to desperately earn money to support my younger brother's education. He went to London and, in order to earn more money, worked two jobs during the day and night, hoping to help his younger brother complete his studies. However, after several years of hard work, the narrator realized that his younger brother had not studied well at all. The shattering of David's dream of reading also caused the narrator's faith to collapse. The narrator came to London to strive to earn more money for his brother's education, thinking that London represents greater freedom and the sky. Before David's dream of reading was shattered, the narrator's life was indeed filled with freedom and joy. However, when his younger brother David confessed, the narrator's belief in struggle collapsed. This freedom and joy are built on the life of his younger brother David, so when his dream is shattered, the narrator's freedom and faith will also disappear. The narrator has not truly lived for himself since childhood, so the freedom he has gained is ethereal and fragile. Because of this, the narrator cannot obtain true freedom.

Bobby: Invalid Freedom on African Land

"In a Free State" is the fourth story in this book. The protagonists are British Bobby and Linda. They live in a certain country in Africa. The story tells of Bobby and Linda's journey back to the Southern Office by car from the capital. Bobby was an official of the former colonial government, and he was also a homosexual. However, his homosexuality did not make him live well in the UK. Bobby was once arrested by the British government due to his homosexuality. He was ostracized and ridiculed by others, and his spirit was at one point shattered. On his journey back to the Southern Office, he confided to Linda; he had a mental breakdown when he was in Oxford. In order to gain more freedom, Bobby came to South Africa. When he was at a New Shropse bar in South Africa, he also expressed his escape from the UK to a Zulu: If there is a chance to reproduce, he hopes it can be their skin color (Naipaul, 2019). But does Bobby really want to break away from his white identity and become a true African? Actually, it's not the case. His kindness and assistance to the African people are built on his selfish purpose. He is friendly to Africans in order to play with African boys without any hesitation and satisfy his homosexual desires. Naipaul has repeatedly hinted at Bobby's goal in the story. Bobby slowed down the speed. He bent over, holding the steering wheel in one hand and lifting it low with the other, slowly waving towards the first boy who appeared. The boy pretended not to see, but Bobby kept smiling and continued to wave his hands until he passed by all the boys. Bobby did not know these African boys; he just drove past them. But he greeted them so warmly and smiled at them. The real purpose behind these behaviors is that Bobby wants to be able to

approach African boys more easily in the future, in order to satisfy his sexual desire. Bobby does not care which African boy it is; he just wants to satisfy his desires time and time again.

When encountering different Africans, Bobby will communicate with them in different tones and attitudes. Because he does not want Africans to develop aversion and hatred towards him. However, whenever Africans do something that makes him dissatisfied, Bobby's attitude towards them becomes apparent. When refueling at a gas station, African workers left scratches of varying depths on Bobby's car. Bobby suddenly pushed to open the car door, and the African was hit by the car door, almost falling over. Then, Bobby roared that look what you've done, you've ruined my windshield, you've ruined all the windows (Naipaul, 2019). His attitude towards Africans was instantly revealed in its true form, and this roar further exacerbated Africans' fear and hatred towards Bobby. Bobby will never achieve true freedom in this land of Africa. Because no matter how Bobby disguised his attitude towards Africans, he always reverted to the attitude of white colonizers towards Africans when his own interests were violated. He has been relying on his own power to satisfy his personal interests without hesitation on the land of Africa. It is precisely because of such hypocrisy and fickleness that Bobby's pursuit on the land of Africa is destined to end in violence by Africans. His arms were twisted back tighter and his entire body was thrown forward. After falling on the concrete floor, he felt a pair of boots stomping heavily on his back, neck, and chin (Naipaul, 2019). Bobby's freedom on the land of Africa is destined to be invalid and void.

Conclusions

Naipaul is one of the few literary figures in the history of contemporary excellent British literature. His rich background and upbringing environment have brought rich research connotations to his works. The book *In a Free State* was completed by Naipaul during his visits to various African countries. In this book, Naipaul implies his own attitude towards the African people, former colonial countries, and people, as well as his understanding of freedom.

This article starts with the word freedom and focuses on analyzing the reasons why the protagonists in the story cannot obtain true freedom. Although Santos ultimately gained American citizenship and freed himself from Indian status, this freedom was based on his marriage to the Habsher woman, not his own hard work. At the end of the story, Santos became aimless and ethereal. His next life is just to be able to fill his body, and his spiritual world is still in a state of darkness and freedom. The narrator among the David brothers works hard to make money for their younger brother's education in order to change his fate and lead a better life. When his younger brother told him that he had no confidence in reading again, the narrator's spiritual world also became precarious. He could not find the motivation for life. Because in the narrator's consciousness, he lives for his younger brother David. So when his younger brother David no longer wanted him to make money to support him, the narrator lost hope for life. He is free in Washington, but his spirit will never be free. The narrator has never lived for himself. Bobby is different from the other protagonists in this book. Bobby is a British white man from a certain country in Africa. He is cautious on the land of Africa, yet he does as he pleases. When Africans do not touch their interests, Bobby will use hypocritical goodwill to be friendly with Africans. But when Africans accidentally harm their interests, Bobby will reveal his true colors and treat them with a bad attitude. Even worse, Bobby's false pretense was only for the sake of playing with more African boys and satisfying his own sexual desires in the future. Such selfish thoughts and purposes have exacerbated Africans' hatred towards Bobby. In the end, Bobby was subjected to violence from Africans. His seemingly powerful freedom is ultimately nothing

but nothingness. Ultimately, the protagonists in the three stories are all seemingly free and unable to achieve true freedom. Their spiritual world is bound by different reasons.

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