

Behind ‘mansplain’: The Challenging of Colonialism in Girls’ Response in a Chat Group

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Abstract—In this paper, I look at how the intersectionality of feminism and colonialism on Tinder – one of the biggest dating Apps – contributes to the production and circulation of gender tensions in modern China. To do so, I have been staying in a particular chat group for half a year, created by a female Tinder user who shows strong dissatisfaction with Chinese men on Tinder and now includes more than 300 women holding similar values. They frequently share experiences of using Tinder characterized by taunting, complaining, and swearing towards a particular type of male Tinder users who were “typical Chinese men” in their eyes.

During this time, I collected various data: the male profiles, chat records on Tinder and in the group, how and why females rename themselves mockingly targeting such males. I adopt Linguistic Ethnography to analyze the emerging discourses that shape the large gender tensions. I aim to show that the logic underlying why the mocking is always related to western culture. These men are annoyed about Chinese females getting in touch with western men, calling them “easy girl” and teaching women patronizingly. However, they simultaneously use profiles with foreigners, western education backgrounds and introduce themselves in English to show off their charm to win the woman's attention. In response, girls sometimes deliberately provoke these men by praising western men and comment on the resulted conversations in the chat group.

Based on this analysis, I argue that the patriotism enacted by these men is challenged by the group whose mocking as a discursive practice, although on the surface aligned with colonialism (e.g., praising western males), constitutes a form of anticolonialism potentially advancing the ongoing gender movement in China. Furthermore, this group's practice points to further research on dating platforms and females on the frontline of gender tension.

Index Terms—Colonialism, females, gender, westernization.

I. INTRODUCTION

Online dating has been a popular way to make (girl/boy) friends, hook up, or one-night date, with the development of smartphones, especially for youth. Many dating applications, like Tinder, “incentivizes conformity to traditional heterogender norms and encourages racist and classist swiping behaviour” [1].

On Tinder, the number of men is twice as many as that of women who are less likely to swipe right, which means yes, so they will receive much more thumbs-up than men [2]. Most men swipe right to ensure they can appear more times on women's screens, increasing the possibility of being matched [1], [3].

Only by matching each other can the conversation begin,

but sometimes the dialogue broke up because of mansplaining, which refers to “a sort of smell of a man performed like a father” in Chinese, a combination of ‘man’ and ‘explain’ in English, refers to a man explaining something to a woman in a condescending way. In a relationship between sexes, they will unconsciously put themselves in a high position, like a father, thinking they know more than women they talk to, speaking in a patronizing way, taunted by females as mansplaining [4]. It is used by a female group of more than 300 females (including gay men with female psychological identity), created by a woman who made complaints about mansplaining on Weibo (Chinese Twitter), expanded by other women who agree with her. They blame all the unpleasant talk with men on mansplaining and fight back in their way.

This paper focuses on how those females beat back and why they chose this kind of way. Do these women's practices only challenge mansplaining? With these data, I want to show some deep-seated reasons linked with colonialism [5]. I have been staying in the group for a long time to discover how did this happen, and this paper will analyze the complete process of fighting, reasons and consequences of the process to see how the challenging of those girls is related to colonialism.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To discover the relationship between mansplaining and colonialism, we need to review the origin of gender discourse and the history of colonialism in mainland China. From the inside of China, Confucian ethics played an important role that helped establish the central discourse of masculinity and patriarchy [6]. From the outside of China, colonialism, from the military aggression to economic and cultural appendage, constructed the historical memory of the whole nation and shaped the formation and development of Chinese culture [7]. In addition, semi-colonial and semifeudal society, from 1840 to 1919, made it difficult for feminism to grow, significantly impacting gender and culture [8]. The slow progress of feminism and strong patriarchal thoughts make Chinese men have their own understanding of masculinity.

Masculinity in China is supported by female mating preference as well. As [9] said, Good-Genes, Good-Provider and Good-Father are the 3-dimensional features of Chinese female mating preference. For Chinese women of all ages and classes, Good-Provider, which means good financial capacity and potential resources, is the most important factor, which could be proved by his educational level. Chinese women did show a preference for men's higher education [10]. And it provides some men with the confidence of mansplaining.

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There is much online information discussed mansplaining and how women respond vehemently [2]. Some of them are recognized as Feminazi, which has led to deepen the contradictions and conflicts on social media [11]. With this literature, I will analyze my data with Linguistic ethnography.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Linguistic ethnography is a relatively new term within the broader field of socio- and applied linguistics [12]. In this tradition, the relationship between language and society is strong. The words, sentences and grammar people use are closely related to their identity and conditions. This mode of observation requires the observer to consider people's daily life and activity patterns. Also, researchers need to explore the connection between specific spaces/time and general spaces/time, in other words, to find the intersection between points and faces and explain how and why this happened.

I chose it because I was looking forward to a mode to interpret interesting views and talks from some Chinese women, which is likely to be related to the current situation of gender inequality in mainland China. The strength of discourse power depends on the quantity. When female language has become a hashtag on the Internet, the problem has reached a sharp point [13]. What does Chinese feminism express through women's language, and what are the exact problems between sexes require a nuanced approach that is updated timely, which can build connections across time and space constraints. And the next part will show the details.

IV. ANALYSIS

A. Mr N and Mr C.E.T.

In this group, those girls will post introductions and chat records of men and then taunt and make complaints about them together. First, we can look at two men who appeared simultaneously: Mr N and Mr C.E.T.

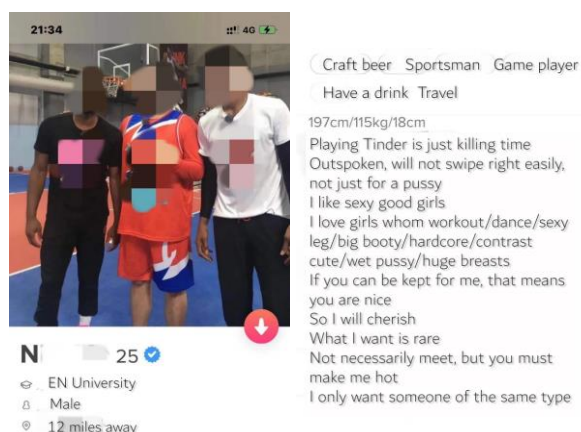


Fig. 1. Profile and introduction Mr N posted.

The photo Mr N posted (Fig. 1) is that he was playing basketball with two black men. The first sentence is “197cm/115kg/18cm”, which shows his external condition. The second sentence is “Playing *Tinder* is just killing time. *Outspoken, will not swipe right easily, not just for a pussy*”,

which describes him as a serious man instead of a playboy. Then the following paragraphs talk about his demands on women in all aspects, which he did in the tone of choosing goods as if women are treated as commodities. The starting point of the last sentences has always been himself, only thinking about his ideas, like “*you must make 'me' hot; 'I' only want someone of the same type*”. Everything he says about females' body and sex constructs an image of males who only cares about sexual experience, which is totally different from what he said in the second sentence – Playing *Tinder* is just killing time/not just for a pussy.

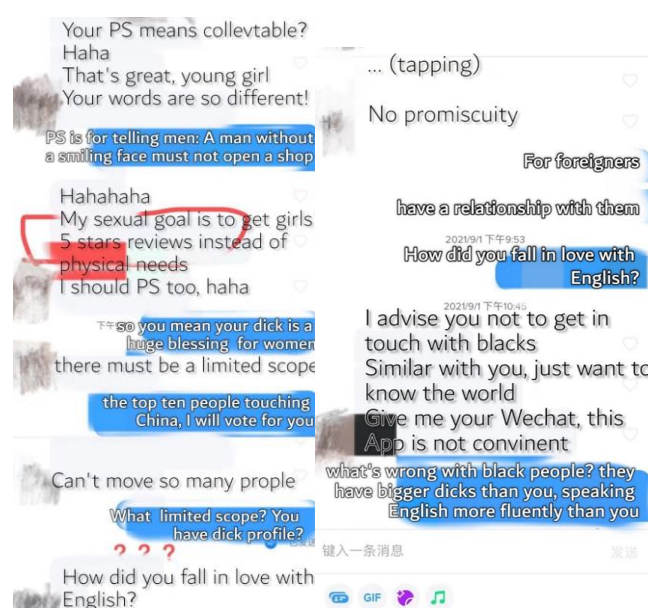


Fig. 2. The Chat between Mr N and the girl

In the chat record (Fig. 2a), he said *my sexual goal is to get girls' 5 stars reviews instead of physical needs*. The girl responded, *so you mean your dick is a huge blessing for women?* She used the word “a huge blessing” to satirize he is prettifying his sexual goal and depreciating women's sexual needs with his absolute confidence of “5 stars” (Fig. 2a).

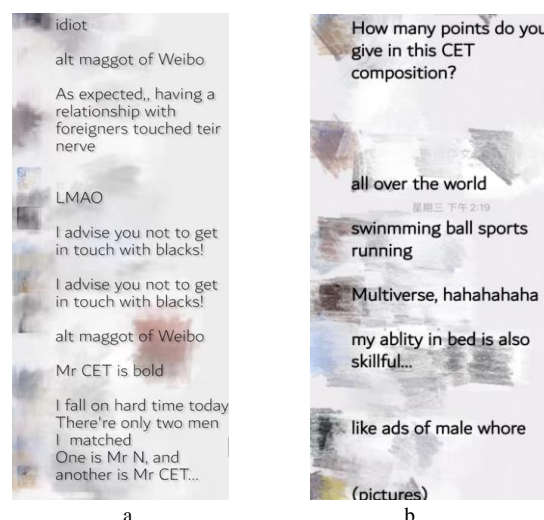


Fig. 3. The chat record about Mr C.E.T. in the female chat group

Then they talk something about English because his profile was with two black men, and his name is English ((Fig. 2a). But when the girl asked him *how did you fall in love with*

English, he responded *I advise you not to get in touch with blacks* (Fig. 2b). Then the girl said the last sentence and posted it to the group, *what's wrong with black people, they have bigger dicks than you, speaking English more fluently than you* (Fig. 2b). This is where the girl challenged his position shaped by himself directly instead of insinuation. The whole group laughed at him, repeating the sentence he said about “blacks”, calling him a maggot (Fig. 3a). At the same time, the pictures of Mr C.E.T. appeared.

Mr C.E.T., given by the group (Fig. 3a), refers to College English Test. He wrote his introduction in English (Fig. 4), and girls gave him a nickname to taunt. This type of man will get annoyed when Chinese women have a relationship with foreign men, sometimes even just friends, calling them easy girls who worship everything foreign. However, when they introduce themselves or show their masculine charm, they will use everything related to the west to show how “better” they are. They place restrictions on women, but at the same time, they are getting closer to what they call “fawning on foreigners.”

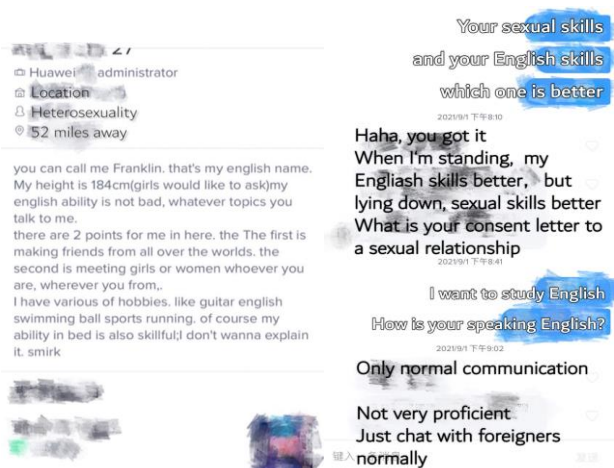


Fig. 4. The introduction of Mr C.E.T.

Fig. 5. The chat between Mr C.E.T. and the girl.

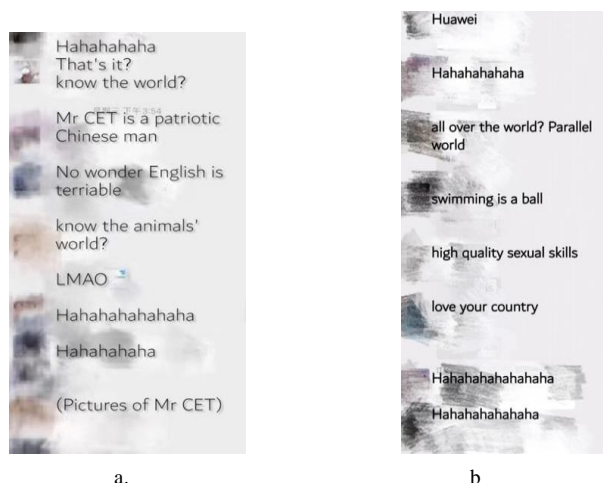


Fig. 6. Girls taunt Mr C.E.T. as a “patriotic” man.

In the chat record (Fig. 5), he asked the girl *what is your consent letter to a sexual relationship*, to see if he could meet her standard. But the girl did not respond. After 30 mins, she just asked him *I want to learn English. How is your speaking English?* And then the group called Mr C.E.T. a good patriotic man (Fig. 6a), which is full of ironies. Because the detail shows, his phone is Huawei (Figure 4&6.2), a Chinese

brand of electronic products, treated as a symbol of patriotism and anticolonialism by many people [14], [15].

Nevertheless, he introduces himself in English. The first sentence focus on his English name, and the second one concentrates on his English ability, like “*you can call me Franklin, my English is not bad*” (Fig. 4). Saying the words of colonization in an anti-colonial tone is an essential factor of ‘mansplain’ and a time bomb of girls’ deprecation.

B. ABBM

According to the above two examples, we can notice that whether arrogance or dishonesty, condescendingly teaching women is ‘mansplain’. But only when ‘mansplain’ is connected with western culture will girls be absolutely furious, like Feminazi. In other words, what seems to be hidden under the situation of gender tension is the conflict between self-colonisation and anti-colonisation. This anti-colonial consciousness makes them look like Feminazi, but girls hardly abuse women compared with the latter’s indiscriminate attacks. They use accurate and clear words to taunt the target group instead of all men, like their names. Girls have renamed themselves in the group in a self-deprecating way. From my observations, when some men appear, who could make girls fly into a rage, females would rename in two different ways. One is the female image that such men expect; the other is the keywords to pride themselves, often associating with colonialism, for example, *Harvard Medical School - Cardiac Surgeon, and American bachelor's degree & British master's degree (or ABBM for short)* (Fig. 7).

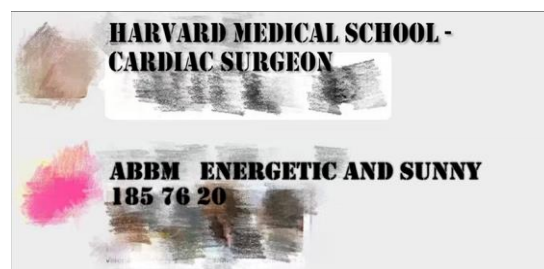


Fig. 7. Girls rename themselves.

Both names come from men putting and emphasizing foreign education background first, which is crucial in showing their charm. When a man’s educational background comes from western developed countries, especially the United Kingdom and the United States, like ABBM, he tends to focus on the country rather than the school. Moreover, he would think he is superior and could tell women what to do, which is treated as mansplaining by those girls. If the man’s academic degrees come from Chinese Universities, in most cases, he may neither emphasize nor taunt the girls but browse it as background information.

ABBM is not her full name – ‘*ABBM Energetic and sunny 185 74 20*’, but nobody cares about other things; they focus on ABBM and enjoy calling her ABBM, even if they often only use ‘@’ and ‘you’ in the group. ABBM challenges the core factor of Chinese mansplaining, also related to the fundamental and historical reason behind these girls’ practices. Girls are dissatisfied with the sense of inferiority of China’s local culture and a struggle against the sense of superiority of westernization [16]. After the Cold War, the United States became an academic superpower. Its higher education became the standard for the world, especially in third world countries [17]. While China’s higher education is

in the process of moving towards the mass stage, in other words, bachelor's degrees are becoming an available resource for more young people [18]. The first degree is significant for whom are unsure whether they will continue their education. The United States, with its academic strength and academic colonization around the world, might be the first choice. The girls seem to position themselves as distancing from the people who boast about foreign degrees and standing with the cultural confidence from the local degree.

A master's degree may help some young people be more competitive in China, where higher education is gradually becoming popular. BM, which has a short school system and comes from the same cultural and academic power, cannot be better for young people who want to obtain a degree immediately. However, because of this, this has become the focus of some Chinese attacks with anticolonialism. We can often see comments on BM on the Internet, which is almost one-sided: BM is not worth it because one year is too short. Compared with the Chinese postgraduate examination, it is less difficult to apply for BM; The pompous advertisements of agencies have left a negative impression on the public; Some students' English ability may not be significantly improved in one year, so they might not behave as well as imagination. All factors have created BM's evaluation in China. BM has become a new representative word to attack westernization, and other foreign degrees have to suffer.

Over the past hundred years, China's domestic attitude towards westernization has been special because of "semi-colonial" which made part of Chinese culture mixed, that is, local people and westernized compatriots [16]. Since the mid-19th century, the local people's attitude towards westernized compatriots has been very contradictory. For example, insulting titles such as "fake foreign devils" reveal a terrible and harsh attitude [16].

Although the attack on education is no longer insulting, it also expresses the resistance to westernization. However, it does not transform "education" into "people", showing that the local people admit the local origin of westernized compatriots and do not want to use the same origin to provoke [16]. ABBM is both a companion and a traitor. This attitude has changed from their appearance, dress, habits, or language to academic qualifications, constructing China's attitude towards westernization and affirm the development of China's education and culture. As listed above, girls might define these men and challenge Western cultural hegemony while resisting mansplain by emphasizing everything about the west, whether black, English or educational background.

V. CONCLUSION

'Mansplain' shows the contradiction between Chinese colonization and anti colonization in the same person. This contradiction develops with the development of China. By fighting back with everything related to the west, girls may establish a perspective with Chinese women as the main body, admitting men's Chinese identity, the contradictory 'mansplain' hiding the anticolonialism under the gender issue. The question comes back to the West: Why are you being taunted? 'Mansplain' is the interpretation of Chinese women's anticolonialism. It is a more gentle way of resistance. At the same time, it is also the intelligent Chinese response of vulnerable groups to a strong culture, or we could call the wisdom of Chinese women.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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