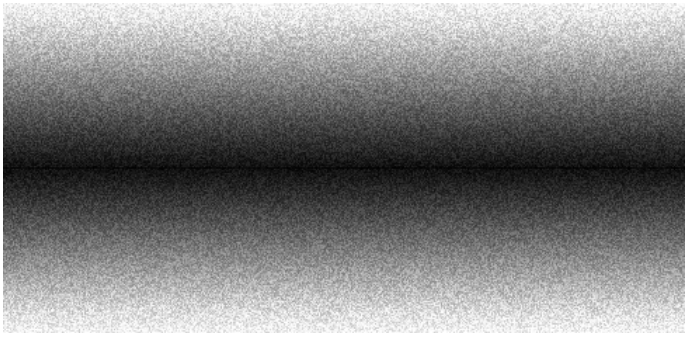
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Anonymus

a POC woman at ZHdK Verso



I want to honestly share my experience as a POC woman at ZHdK Verso DFA and the reflections I have gained from it.

- Reasons for Choosing to be a Member of Verso DFA:

Since enrolling in September 2022.09, I noticed that the students in the Master Fine Arts department are more diverse compared to other German-speaking departments at ZHdK. This diversity includes various international backgrounds and a range of genders. This diversity includes various international backgrounds and a range of genders. However, despite this diversity, the MA Fine Arts department faces challenges related to diversity and inclusion. I realized it is high time to explore the causes of conflicts through an intersectional lens and practice ways to resolve them.

In June 2023, when I learned about the opening for the student representative position at Verso DFA, I decided to apply. My primary aim was to ensure that the feedback, perspectives, and needs of international students, particularly those from Asian backgrounds, were effectively communicated and addressed within the department. Additionally, I sought a part-time job to support my daily life. After a successful Zoom interview in June, I was elected as the new student representative. I officially began my duties at Verso DFA in the middle of September 2023.

During my time in this role, I have encountered significant challenges, including ineffective communication between Verso DFA and myself. Additionally, I have observed instances of Institutional Discrimination in Verso, and a limited understanding of diversity among Verso staff members.

- Institutional Discrimination Features as:

> Institutional Discrimination refers to policies, practices, or procedures within an organization that systematically disadvantage certain groups based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status.

It may not be intentional but can still have significant negative impacts on POC individuals or groups. In the context of my experience at Verso DFA, institutional discrimination manifests in many ways, such as unequal opportunities, biased decision-making processes, or a lack of support for diversity and inclusion initiatives.

1. Unilateral Decision-making.

There appears to be a lack of clarity and consistency regarding my working hours at Verso DFA, leading to frustration and confusion on my part.
During the negotiation of my working hours before starting the job, I explicitly mentioned that I could work up to a maximum of 15 hours per week. I reiterated my working hours several times during Verso DFA's group meetings, and I worked according to the agreed-upon 15 hours per week. During this period, no team member raised any objections until I submitted my first work report, which is required to process my salary payment. At that

moment, I was informed by team members that they couldn't pay me for the hours I had worked. In late October, Verso unilaterally notified me that my working hours needed to be reduced to 20 hours per week. On October 28th, Verso team members again unilaterally informed me that my working hours were reduced to only 8 hours per week.

2. Failure to Pay On Time.

From mid-September to mid-October, Verso initially reduced my wages due to insufficient funds to cover them. After agreeing to the reduced compensation, I submitted the required reports promptly to ensure timely payment. However, it wasn't until mid-December that I received payment for the period spanning September to October. As of late February 2024, I have yet to receive the wages owed to me for the work I performed in October before resigning. Despite submitting all necessary documentation in mid-January 2024, these outstanding wages have not been processed until the beginning of March 2024.

3. Lack of Support for Diversity.

All instructions and details regarding the payment report were provided in German, which consumed more time for me as a non-native German speaker to complete. The report included a section to describe my tasks, with specific options represented by German abbreviations for departments and job categories. Without explanations for each abbreviation, I struggled to understand and accurately select the appropriate category for my tasks. Despite reaching out to Verso staff via WhatsApp and email for assistance, unfortunately, I didn't receive any help. The documents written only in German hinder effective participation for international individuals like me. Internally, Verso decided that translation is the job of the secretary of Verso, not an individual team member. However, there was a delay in processing translations.

Consequently, In the absence of support, I still need to spend a lot of time translating, understanding, filling out, and dealing with paperwork directly related to my compensation. Additionally, I sent translated documents to Verso members. However, the time I spent translating documents to participate in Verso's work wasn't counted as effective working hours.

4. Invisible Barriers and Challenges to Complain.

Verso organization actively seeks the participation of POC individuals to amplify diversity. However, in reality, POC members in Verso receive no support. There are numerous invisible barriers and challenges for POC members to navigate through the complaint process.

Following my expression of concerns regarding the unjust treatment I endured, the Verso spokesperson clarified that Verso operates as a student-led organization. This explanation implied that Verso does not offer employment contracts or remuneration and operates on limited funding sources. Neglecting to furnish essential information before my commencement of work, by defining Verso as a student self-organization, the spokesperson subtly attempted to attribute the challenges I faced to my lack of comprehension of the organization and therefore, took no responsibility for my discrimination experience.

As I stated in point 1, encountering Unilateral Decision-making, the spokesperson did not

state it as a Student-Led Organization. Only when acknowledging responsibility for addressing a particular wrongdoing, a Student-Led Organization would use it as an excuse.

- limited understanding of diversity among Verso staff members

The limited understanding may result in inadequate support for diverse perspectives and experiences within the organization, leading to instances of discrimination, exclusion, or marginalization of individuals from underrepresented backgrounds.

1. “If she can work on it for free, why can't you?”

During my first month in Verso, individuals with discrimination experiences came to me, both anonymously and openly, seeking support. Following my first report, Verso DFA member K and I engaged in thorough discussions to delineate which aspects of my responsibilities were permissible. It gradually became apparent to me that Verso DFA was not prepared to open up to hearing discrimination experience, which is against my initiative to join.

I said to K, that if the Verso DFA believes that my involvement in listening to discrimination cases is not part of Verso's duties, I will honestly convey this to MA Fine Arts registered students to avoid overstepping and prevent any misconceptions.

However, K expressed that while Verso wished to limit its involvement in discrimination cases, there was still a desire to be somewhat engaged in addressing them. He presented a work report of another POC woman's working hours and payment, demonstrating that she was engaged in discrimination cases without getting paid. K then posed a question to me, asking, "If she can work without payment for cases of racial discrimination, why can't you?

This inconsistent attitude indicates that Verso DFA has issues in addressing discrimination and refuses to allocate resources to address discrimination issues. K's question implies a notion of unfair treatment, suggesting that I should handle discrimination cases unpaid like other POC.

2. “You can use CHATgpt, why does translating a file take you so much time?”

During my involvement in the work, I participated in discussions regarding the drafting and discussion of policy guidelines for Verso's DFA work However, due to the policy being entirely in German, I found it challenging to fully comprehend its contents. Consequently, I proposed to Verso DFA members that I undertake the translation of the document. With unanimous agreement from the team, I began the translation, which involved not only linguistic translation but also understanding and annotating uncertain expressions.

Following the submission of my report, K requested a meeting with me. On the evening of October 23rd, we convened around 6 p.m. During our discussion, K expressed his perplexity regarding my need for additional time to translate the policy documents. I clarified to him that grasping the institutional implications embedded within the text wasn't immediate for me, particularly considering there was a cultural or experiential gap.

K replied that despite being a local, he had never engaged in policy drafting before. He could not understand why it took so much time as he could finish in half an hour.

This unjust assumption falls under Assumptive Discrimination. In this case, the white male individual is assuming an understanding of the behavior of the POC woman based on his own experiences and viewpoints and implies my incapability to finish work on time or cheating working hours to get extra payment.

3 “It’s not fair for other verso members.”

On October 28th, K sent me a private message via WhatsApp, informing me that my weekly working hours were reduced to 8 hours. In my response, I emphasized the discrepancy between this decision and the agreement we reached on the 23rd regarding both the duration and the work content. Additionally, I expressed my intention to depart from the Verso organization.

K asserted that it would be unfair if only I handled reports of discrimination cases, as it would result in me receiving more working hours. In response, I clarified that I had shared the contact of the individual who received discrimination in our work group, enabling anyone to access the information and take appropriate action, not solely relying on me. However, individuals subjected to discrimination, particularly racial discrimination, often seek initial assistance from other POC individuals.

During this exchange, I noted that Verso members were worried that POC individuals have an advantage in working on discrimination-related cases. It indicates a fear of uncertainty, believing that POC individuals' involvement may hurt the work environment or opportunities.

4. “Tell me, what is racism?”

In the same conversation on the 28th, K asked me to tell him what racism is.
I replied, “Based on the workflow you explained to me: Firstly, someone reports a racial discrimination experience to Verso and seeks help. Then, all Verso members need to unanimously agree to let one member represent Verso in communicating with this person and gathering the initial report. Only when you agree me represent Verso to communicate with the discriminated individual, and this person agrees to share discrimination experience, I can provide documented reports to you to prove that racial discrimination incidents do indeed occur at ZHdK.
If you do not agree to let me represent Verso involving racial discrimination cases, or if the discriminated individual didn't want me to share with Verso what happened, how can I prove to you that racial discrimination exists? I cannot disclose the private conversations between me and the victim.”

This conversation reflects a lack of understanding or recognition of Systemic and Structural Racism and the barriers faced by individuals in reporting discrimination.

When K asks the individual to define racism, it suggests a lack of awareness or acknowledgment of the pervasive nature of racism and discrimination. Without proof of discrimination, he will not approve of Verso engaging in helping individuals with discrimination experiences.

The response highlights the paradox of the process within Verso for handling reports of racial discrimination.

As a private act, I listen to the experiences of other POC individuals facing discrimination, yet I am unable to share them with Verso members without their permission. Only if Verso can open up for listening and helping, instead of asking for proof if discrimination truly exists or not, discriminated individuals might come to report their injustice experience and seek help.
However, institutional barriers, such as asking to prove racism before agreeing to act, prevent individuals from seeking support or reporting their experiences.

5 “You seem not to care (about racism), unlike me, I work for free.”

In the exchange on the 28th, when I repeatedly emphasized my intention to leave the Verso organization, K sent me this message: “You seem not to care (about racism), unlike me, I work for free.” When the first white male member of Verso said this to me, I could still attribute it to a lack of diversity education on a personal level. However, during a meeting about the discrimination I faced at Verso, accompanied by members of the Equality Office, another white male member of Verso asked me why I felt attacked when a white male said to me, “You seem not to care about it (racism), unlike me. I work (against it) for free.”

Members of the Equality Office helped me formulate the following statement: It's a Stereotype to assume that all POC individuals should work for free out of care for the interests of the POC community. His assumption that I don't care about racism could be based on Stereotypes or biases about POC, which further marginalizes my viewpoint and experiences.

However, the aggression I felt went far beyond the impact of Stereotype on me:
Invalidation of Experience: The white man's statement may imply that he believes his understanding of racism is more valid or important than mine simply because of his race. This can feel dismissive of my lived experiences and knowledge as a POC woman.

Assumption of Ignorance: His comment suggests that I don't care about racism, which is hurtful and offensive. It assumes that I am not actively engaged or concerned about issues that directly affect me and my community.

Savior Complex: The implication that he cares more about racism than I. A person believes he is superior or more enlightened than others in addressing social justice issues.

Dismissal of Efforts: If I was actively involved in addressing racism or have subjective experiences with it, his statement may disregard my efforts or contributions to the cause.

- Conclusion

Based on my experience as a student representative in Verso DFA, it's evident that Verso is not adequately prepared to accommodate POC members in its organization nor capable of addressing diversity-related topics.

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