

# WHO'S BEHIND YOUR

# ORDER?

Photo-stories of  
Brazilian women working  
in the delivery sector  
in London



## Introduction

*Who's behind your order?* is part of a body of collaborative research on Brazilian migrant women's experiences of gender-based violence in London that I have been leading since 2016. The earliest stage of this work mapped the experiences of Brazilian women survivors and is summarised in the report, *We Can't Fight in the Dark*. This showed that 82 per cent of women had experienced gender-based violence, with 78 per cent perpetrated in the public sphere, especially in the workplace. It also illustrated that while the labour market is a major site of gender-based abuses, financial autonomy is central to ensuring women's independence from perpetrators of direct and indirect forms of gendered violence.

*We Can't Fight in the Dark* has provided the foundation for subsequent work with MinA that has reflected a shift towards more participatory and co-produced research. A major theme of this collaboration has been to situate migrant women as the main protagonists of the research, allowing them to raise awareness of their lives, develop practices to resist gendered violence and to reclaim their rights in London. Revealing invisible communities who contribute to the functioning of the urban eco-

nomy of London has also been a major theme in my work with the wider Latin American community in the city. Parallel research in the favelas of Maré in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, has allowed us to take a transnational perspective on why women migrate and how direct and indirect gender-based violence affects women across their lifecourse and across borders. The wider project within which *Who's behind your order?* is situated, aims to tackle gendered violence transnationally through a series of international knowledge exchange, awareness raising and impact activities across Brazilian-British borders. Awareness raising of the role of financial autonomy through app-based delivery as a way of addressing gendered exclusion and structural violence as well as empowering women are central to this wider aim.

It is an honour to collaborate with MinA in this latest venture in uncovering the lives of Brazilian women working in the app-based delivery sector in *Who's behind your order?* I hope that this is the first of many steps towards improving their working conditions in the future.

**Professor Cathy McIlwaine**  
Principal Investigator 'Tackling Gendered Violence Transnationally'  
Department of Geography  
King's College London

*Migrants in Action (MinA)* is an arts based organisation run by and for minoritised migrant women survivors of gender-based violence in London. Our mission is to provide a creative & safe space where participants can take risks, learn and grow together as well as to bring our stories to a wider audience.

Understanding the needs of the Brazilian community in London and their lives in survivor mode, we opted for running this photo-voice project exclusively online via Whatsapp and Zoom. *Who's behind your order?* gathered five Brazilian women aged between 31 to 44 years old, working in the delivery sector, in a month of photo-sharing on Whatsapp with a Zoom session on the first and last day. Each week, theatre facilitator Carolina Cal shared a provocation/question which participants replied with photographs and a text explaining the image. In addition, photographer and anthropologist Paula Siqueira shared tips on how to capture the essence of the subject to be photographed and poet Simone Souza, guided on creative writing.

For all the participants, this was the first arts based project they have taken part in their life. The idea of 'doing something different' and the feeling of 'we are not alone' were the

driving force of this project. Most expressed the interest in meeting and sharing stories with other fellow delivery women as a way of releasing the day to day difficulties and frustrations as well as to build a sense of community and hope.

As for the result, in our last Zoom call, participants shared how important it was for them to take some time to reflect, 'using different lenses,' on their journey as migrant women. With this booklet, we want to show the reality and feelings of what it is like to be a woman working as a courier in a foreign country and expect that it will reflect in some changes in the app-based delivery sector in the UK: 'hopefully I can see improvements for everyone.'

We hope you enjoy the journey.

**Carolina Cal**  
**MinA's Creative Director**

When the door opens,  
that's when you shut down to me  
you ignore my presence,  
your package is important.  
It doesn't matter if, with vulnerable  
body, I hold in my hands the weight  
of being a woman.  
This territory is not mine,  
I'm not from here, I'm from nowhere.  
The position you destined for me is to  
humiliate and despise me and thus,  
with cowardice, convince me that  
I will never end up breaking  
my chains.

**AKA SI**



## Being an immigrant woman

in London means waking up already thinking, "What challenge will I have to face today?"

The weather is colder, the days grey, but nothing compares to the indifference and helplessness we deal with every day at work.

The car, previously used for trips out, family time, is not transformed into a work tool, not just offering us leisure, but also our livelihood.



I take risks,  
going out in my car  
at night...  
in the snow...  
the cold...  
the rain...  
the pitch dark...



HEAR MY VOICE



My comforting thoughts are of my children, who are at home, waiting for my love and affection. And my sacrifice won't be in vain, because it's for them, so that they have the best I have to offer.



Good morning, people! **Being an immigrant woman** in London means understanding that, regardless of whatever state you're in, you need to roll up your sleeves, be strong and fight, because we're just like the weather here, really unstable...

## Being an immigrant woman

in London means waking up smiling one day and crying the next. It's wanting to go out one day and stay in the next. It's being able to do everything one day and not getting out from under the duvet the next. It's thinking you're enough one day and you're nothing the next. It's thinking

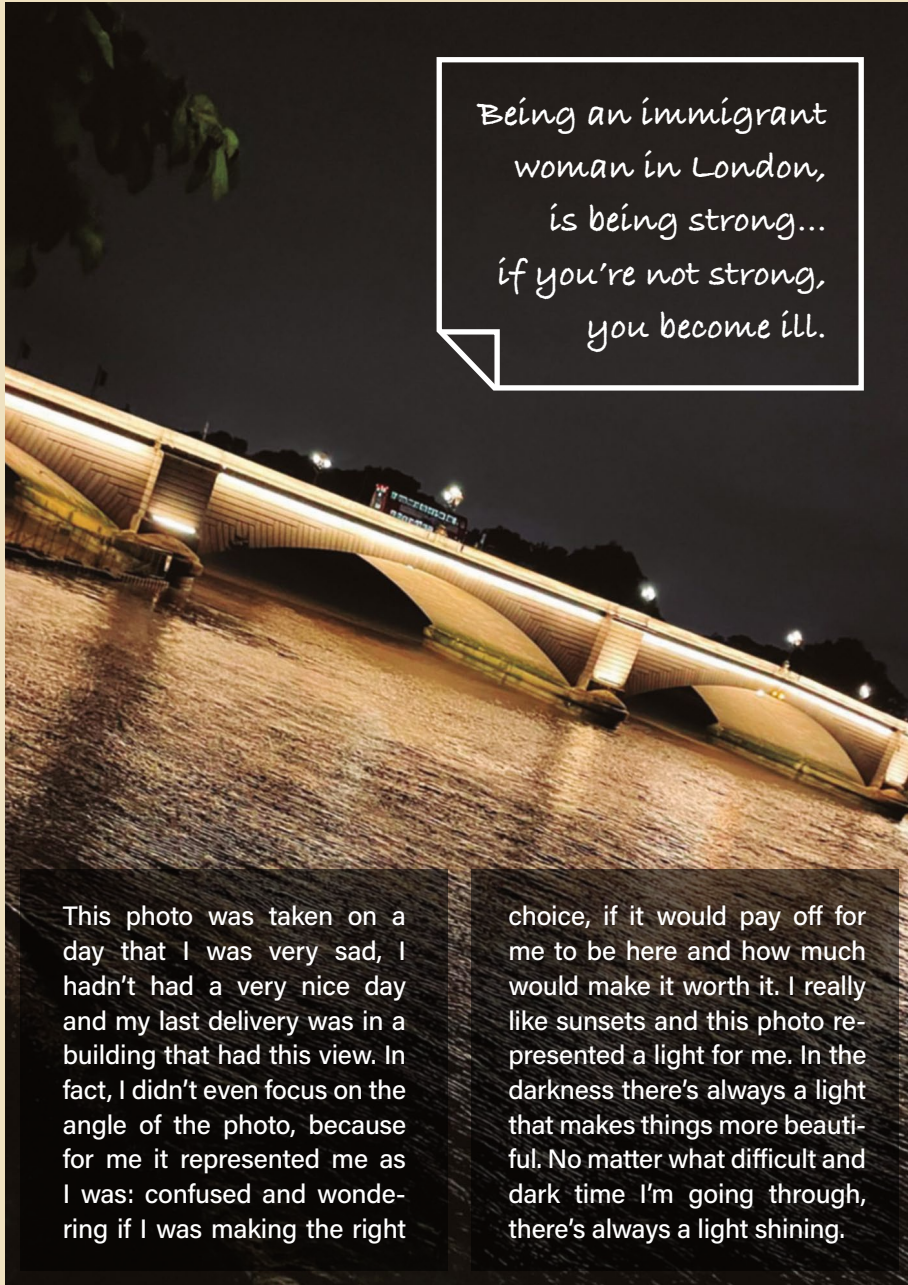
you're evolving one day and going backwards the next. It's waking up to a cold and grey sky one day, and radiant sunshine the next. It's working in jobs you never imagined doing before. It's being unsure every day if you made the right choice or if you should never have left the country. If it's time to go back or if you should stay here.

It's constantly questioning yourself, "If I go back, will I regret it? If I stay, will I be happy?" These doubts and uncertainties only make me ill.

...sometimes it rains, sometimes it's cold, sometimes it's sunny.







*Being an immigrant woman in London, is being strong... if you're not strong, you become ill.*

This photo was taken on a day that I was very sad, I hadn't had a very nice day and my last delivery was in a building that had this view. In fact, I didn't even focus on the angle of the photo, because for me it represented me as I was: confused and wondering if I was making the right

choice, if it would pay off for me to be here and how much would make it worth it. I really like sunsets and this photo represented a light for me. In the darkness there's always a light that makes things more beautiful. No matter what difficult and dark time I'm going through, there's always a light shining.

### Delivery work really is a double-edged sword...

...sometimes we come across good situations, and others which are not so pleasant!

*In my view, the negatives I see are the issue of time, the London weather (rain and snow), the lack of bathrooms that delivery workers can use during their menstrual period.*

Some say they're for customers only and others don't even allow you in. The place where I work is about 20 minutes by motorbike from my house, so it's complicated to go to the bathroom... and when you're menstruating... it's tense!!!

On the positive side for me are the flexible working hours, the prospect of getting to know many beautiful tourist attractions in London while working.

HEAR MY VOICE 

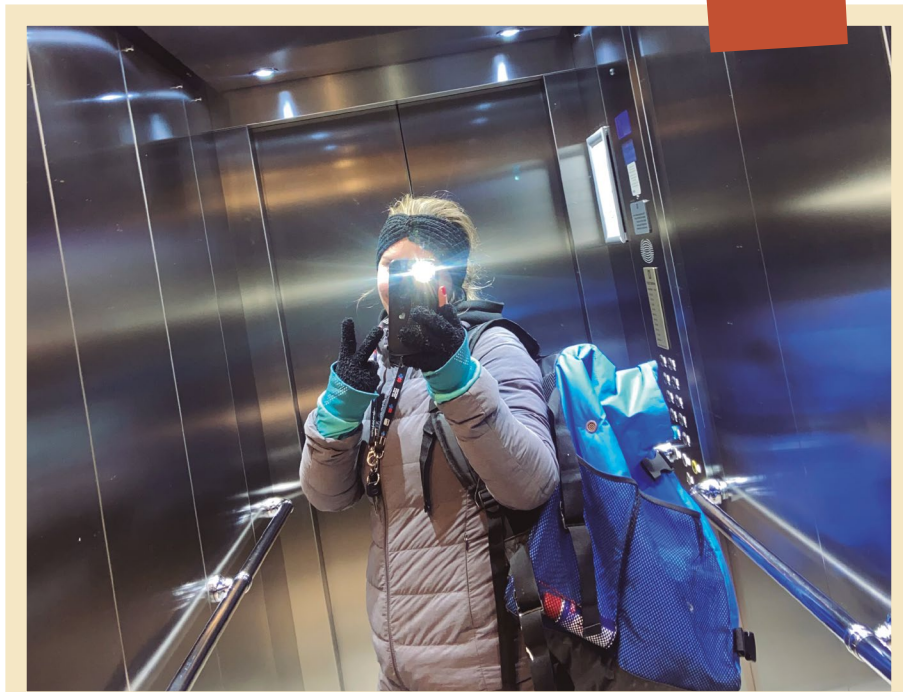


*Overall, no matter what the difficulties are of doing delivery work, I don't regret this choice, since it means I can support myself here and still help my family and children in Brazil.*



**The biggest point in its favour is the flexibility, you can set your own schedule, make up for lost days if you haven't been able to work or need more money.**

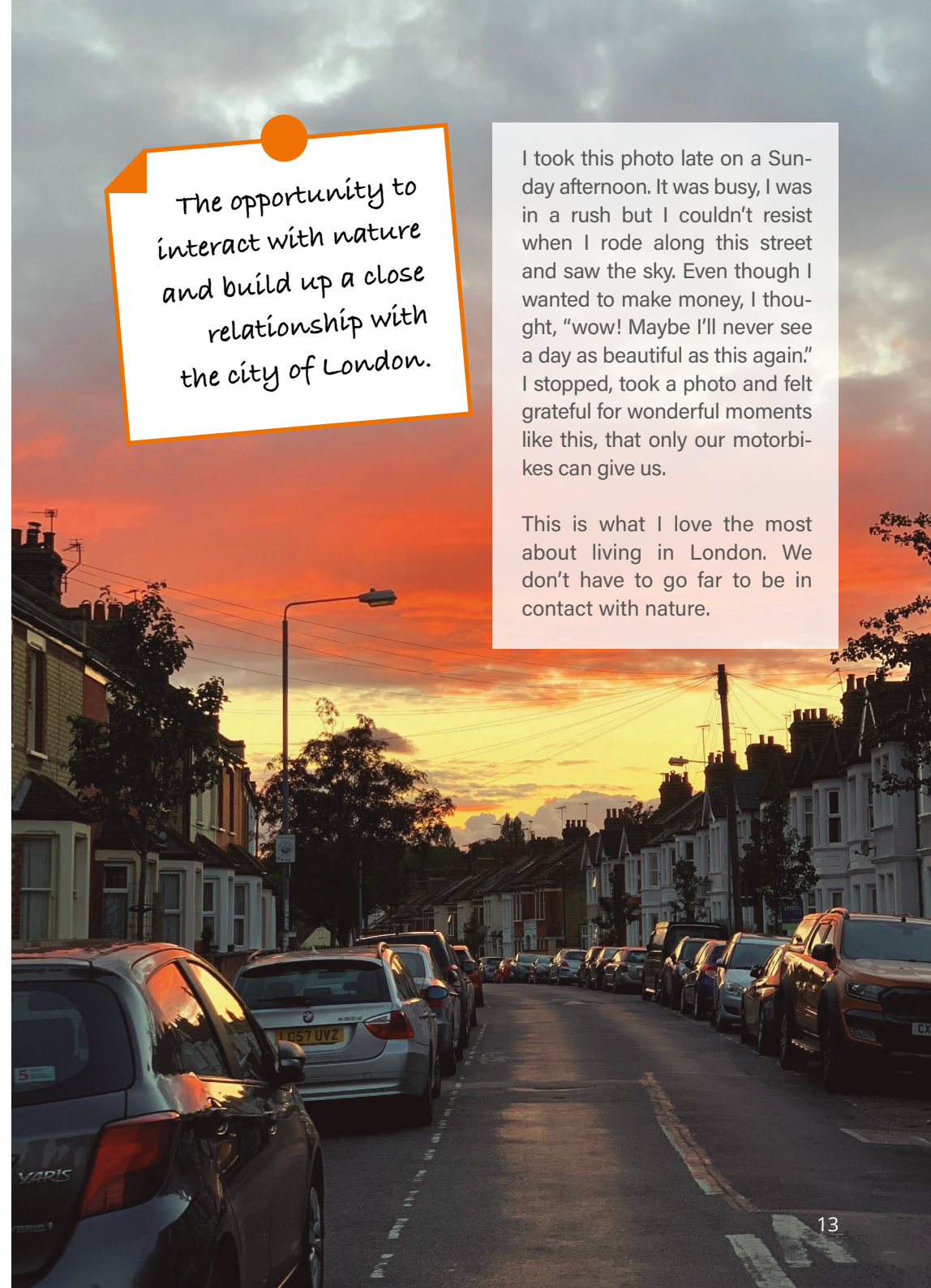
What I like most about working with delivery is the flexibility, I only turn on the app when I want to work, I don't have a boss, a fixed time or day, I don't have to spend time with bad co-workers, and I can take leave or days off whenever it's convenient, have friends and visitors over and go to birthday parties any day or time. I'm not stuck in an office. I can sort something out during work, take a break, stop to eat if I get hungry, or enjoy nature. I love that freedom.



*The opportunity to interact with nature and build up a close relationship with the city of London.*

I took this photo late on a Sunday afternoon. It was busy, I was in a rush but I couldn't resist when I rode along this street and saw the sky. Even though I wanted to make money, I thought, "wow! Maybe I'll never see a day as beautiful as this again." I stopped, took a photo and felt grateful for wonderful moments like this, that only our motorbikes can give us.

This is what I love the most about living in London. We don't have to go far to be in contact with nature.





One of the best moments working in delivery for me is when I get a tip, I feel it's gratitude in material form. I feel very valued.

**Sometimes I'm upset, stressed, tired, and when I get a tip, it usually comes with some praise.**



*"Thanks for doing this hard job, you were really fast."  
It often makes me emotional.*

## Accidents

The driver of the car lost control and hit my motorbike. I had to pay for it myself because he fled the scene. So, what stays with me are the memories and the constant fear of getting hurt, so far from the safety of home and the care of my family.

*It's really awful if you fall, get hurt, or suffer a "near-miss" accident that doesn't happen. It gives you a mini heart-attack whenever it occurs.*





One of my worst days in London was when they took my bicycle, my means of transport, my work tool. It was the most expensive thing I'd bought here in London, it was £900, it was my special asset.

### Violence and theft

Locking up the bike is time consuming, but since I've already been robbed, I'd rather spend this time than lose my bike again. When I know it will be fast, I quickly run into the restaurant, keep looking at the bike from the inside to see if everything is okay, and leave. When I have to go up stairs and deliver on the doorstep, it takes even longer because there are places where you can't lock up the bike and I have to waste time looking. And time wasted is money wasted.

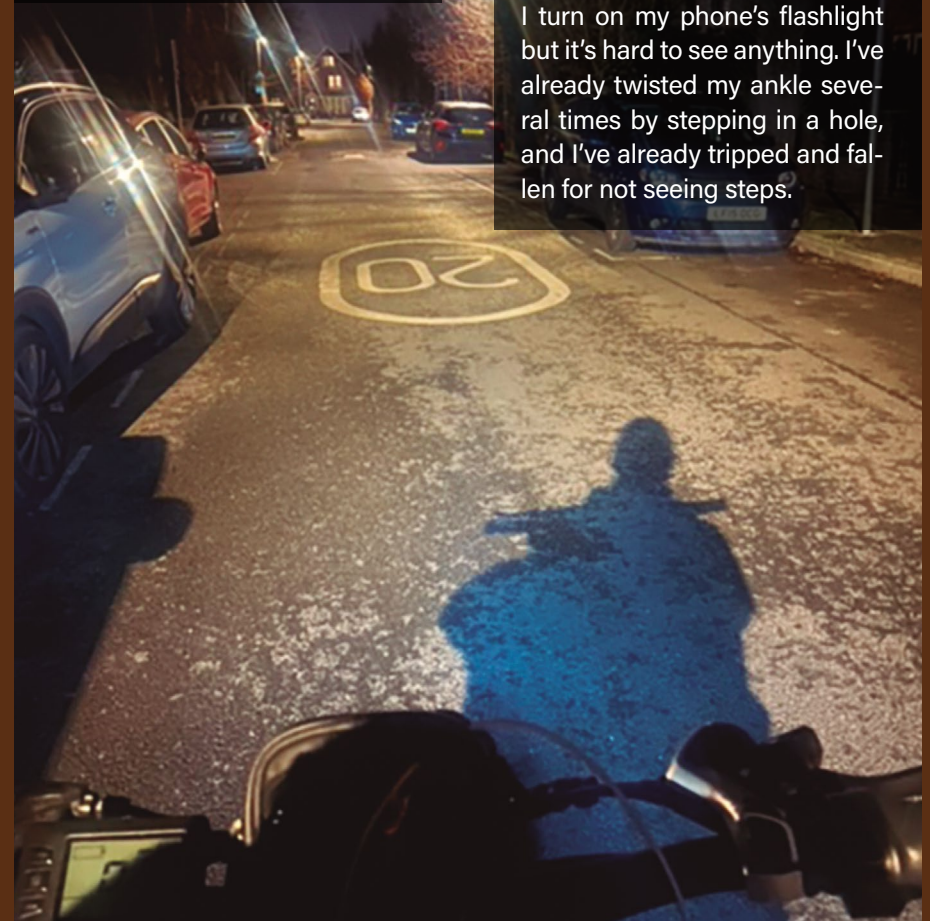


### Dark streets and alleys

I don't like working at night either, but that's when you make the most money. At night I can barely see the house numbers and I feel unsafe, afraid something will happen to me.

*I feel scared every time I do a delivery and the address is down some dark alley, with no light, and with potholes.*

*I turn on my phone's flashlight but it's hard to see anything. I've already twisted my ankle several times by stepping in a hole, and I've already tripped and fallen for not seeing steps.*





## Facing the elements

Today I 've been blaming myself for not wanting to work in the rain, I've already taken two days off this week, so I've barely made any money and it's already Thursday. So I ended up forcing myself to go, even with a sore throat.

Today is one of those typical London days: it's raining and cold. I keep blaming myself for not wanting to work in the rain, I've already taken two days off this week, so I've barely made any money, and it's already Thursday. So I ended up forcing myself to go, even with a sore throat. On top of it all, I'm menstruating, the bike seat is a bit uncomfortable when I'm pedaling. Working in the rain is also really annoying because of the amount of clothes we have to put on. Even though the demand is higher, delivery apps don't pay anything extra on rainy days and most customers don't tip, even when they see us completely wet. How I long to leave, stay in my nest, safe and warm! But it's not always possible to only do pleasant things, there are days when we have to do what we don't want as well. And at the end of the day when I get home I'm going to be proud of myself for not giving up.



That's how many clothes I wear on a cold, rainy day. When I wear them I feel heavy, I lose some mobility. When I take them off it's a relief.

HEAR MY VOICE





## For us women, it is harder.

One day I went to deliver food to a customer and he didn't want to give me the code because he said he was too busy and didn't have time to get his phone. I looked at him and said, "Sir, I need the code, this is my job. I need your cooperation to finalise the order." He looked and said, "I'm not going to get anything because I have more important things to do." I turned around and walked away with his order.



**He started yelling, "Give me back my food, you thief!" Would he treat a man the same way?**



Once I made a delivery at night, and arriving at the customer's house he saw me through the window, waved and I walked towards the door...

*...when he opened the door, he was completely naked. At the time I didn't react, I was very afraid because I felt powerless. At the time I didn't have a visa, so I felt my hands were tied.*

People make us feel so afraid when we don't have a visa that I simply couldn't do anything. After what happened, I asked myself if this would keep happening, and what kind of situations I needed to endure. It was a feeling of humiliation, disappointment and anguish.

*Delivery workers are mostly male, but I feel fine when I already know them. Sometimes, when the collection space is very tight, I feel uncomfortable because the men are very close, behind me and that makes me stressed because, right?!*

**Because I'm a woman, maybe they'll press up against me and then leave. To protect myself, I use the tools I've learned in life, which are: look surly, look behind and look people in the eye so you won't let it happen. I've already been in this situation several times.**

HEAR MY VOICE





## Apps can block your account and, overnight, you have no income.

Yesterday I got an email saying my Amazon delivery insurance hadn't come through - I used the company recommended by them in the application and only now, after this long they told me it hasn't come through because I still haven't got a FULL driving licence for a whole year yet, but which is coming up on Sunday. As a result: they've blocked my account, I can't make deliveries.

Here's a tip for everyone: we're in a country of opportunities and diversity and there are many different ways to earn a living. I have 3 different paid jobs and I'm already specialising to move on to number 4. But until then, we have to have our plan B, C, D for any unforeseen circumstances.

If your vehicle breaks down or is stolen, if there's an accident... As it's not my only source of income (although it's the highest), it's not going to hurt me too much not being able to deliver these days, but I keep thinking, what if that was my only source of income?

The negative points that we have to "live with and accept" because we can't do ANYTHING to change it, are:

- ✦ **The customers' lack of respect and indifference when receiving a delivery;**
- ✦ **The delivery we are carrying isn't well packed, which could affect delivery;**
- ✦ **Having to climb stairs and then more stairs, delaying all our deliveries;**
- ✦ **Carrying more weight than we should;**
- ✦ **Often I get lost near the location because I lose the internet connection.**



Most restaurants see the drivers as nothing. A total disregard for the work.

They don't have a suitable place for us to wait for the order, they ask us to wait outside while they prepare the order. Sometimes the waiting place is next to the rubbish bins, there's nowhere to sit, and we have to wait there, rain or shine. It's hard for us to get a drink of water or a bathroom that they will let us use. They treat us with indifference. They don't give a damn about the weather or the delivery time.



There is a huge order from a single customer I was suppose to carry in my backpack. Luckily, I discovered that in the app you can request to share it with another delivery partner. I do this because I've already hurt my back by carrying too much weight.



Today I tried to deliver for Amazon market for the first time. Guys, imagine the fear of tearing the bags, dropping the parcel, and the strength needed to maneuver the packages.



The saga of fragile packages. This is why many delivery workers choose not to deliver breakfast.

Cups in general (juice, coffee, milkshake) don't seal properly and are extremely fragile material, which makes it a saga to deliver intact and on time.



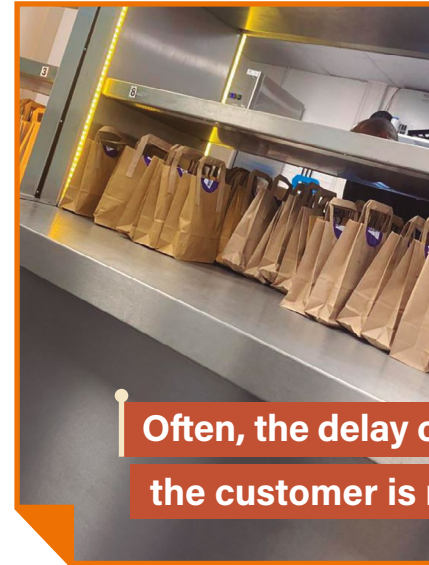
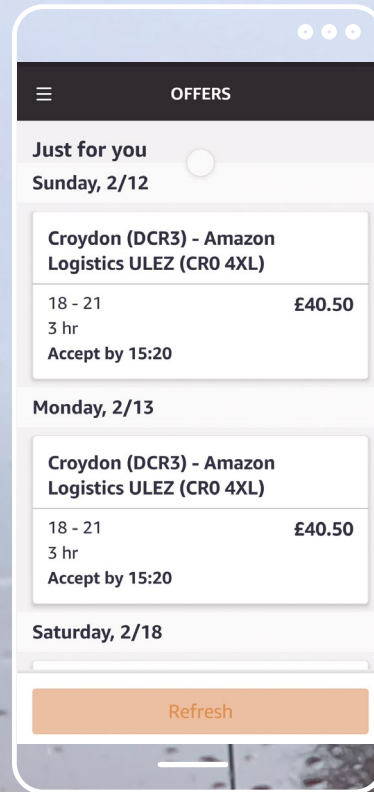
**I'm very concerned about the customer's food. I use two thermal bags and I always leave them tightly closed so that I can arrive at the customer's house with the food still warm.**

But today my day didn't start well. I went to make a delivery from a supermarket and they have those very thin bags. The customer asked me for 2 bottles of wine, pasta, minced beef and sour cream, and guess what? I get very irritated when it happens because it's a waste of time and money. I had to go back home so I could wash my delivery box. And now I don't have the strenght to leave the house anymore because the day has flown by.



## Unpaid working hours

The traffic makes you miss your schedule and that affects your ratings. (This photo is of ride that takes 2 minutes normally, but it took me 45 because of a broken bus. I missed the deadline to arrive at the warehouse.)



Often, the delay combined with how far away the customer is makes the day unprofitable.

In one of the app's "kitchens", we're waiting to pick up the delivery.

So, often, that exhausting day of work won't amount to your expected success. In delivery, there will always be those days of anxiety, low energy and fatigue. But our patience and willpower to succeed in this distant land will always be greater.

In this delivery waiting place, you can't open the door from the outside. My order was ready on the counter and I couldn't do anything.

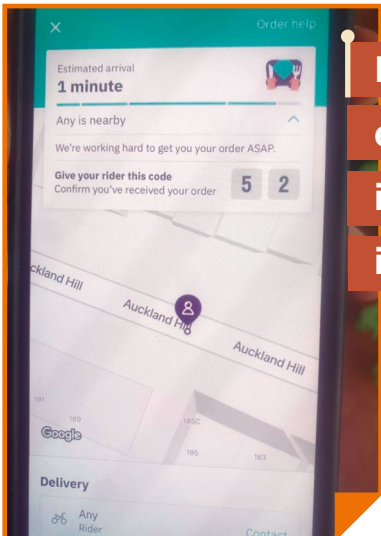


I just had my face pressed against the door, trying to get someone's attention. After a while they saw me and brought it out.



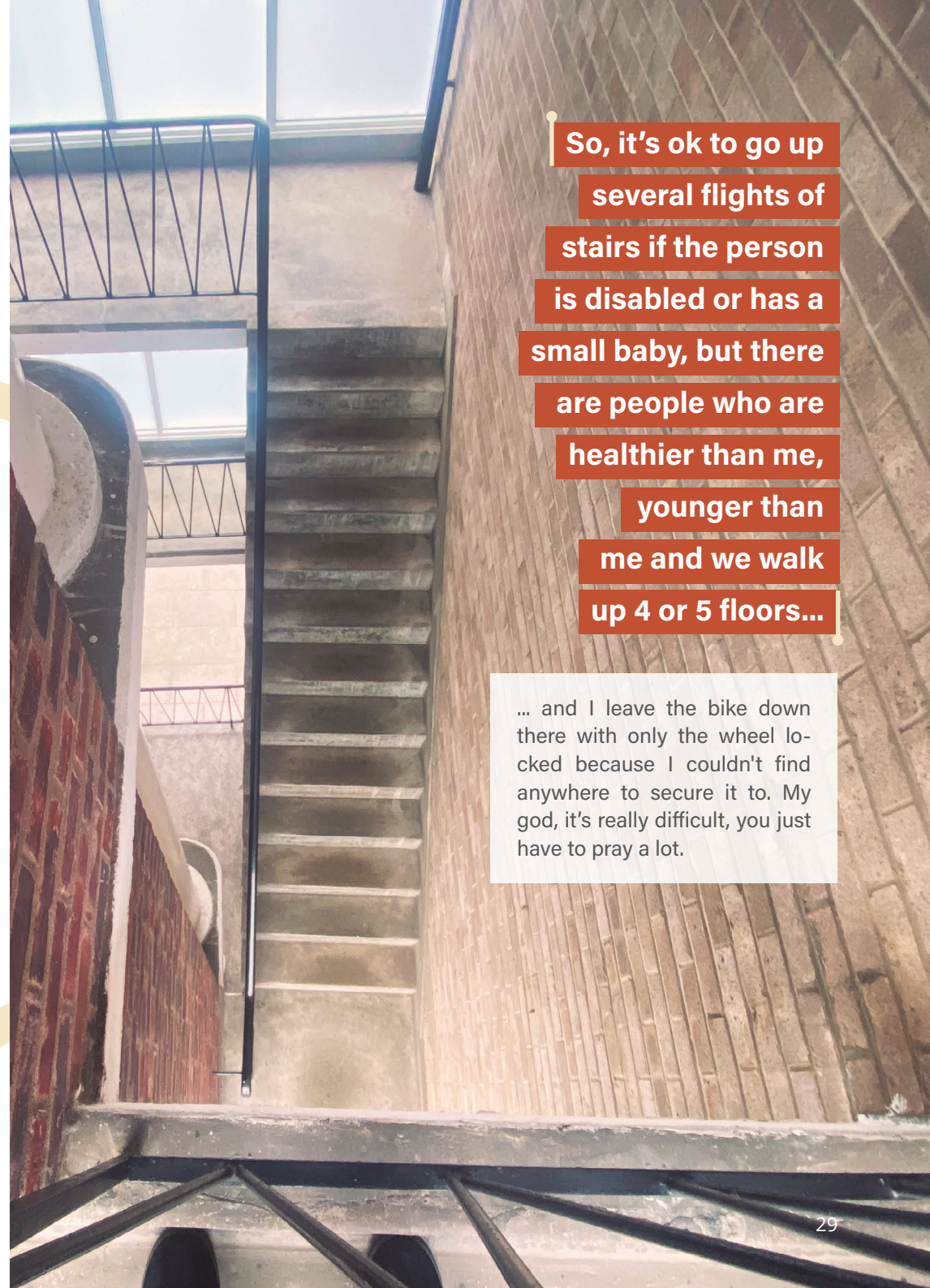


The drama of incomplete addresses, sometimes there is no interphone, the access door to the flats is locked, or the customer isn't responding on the app. You wait and wait... after 7 minutes we can leave with the goods.



**Expenditure on food, equipment, internet, petrol, insurance and taxes are not included in our payments.**

HEAR MY VOICE



**So, it's ok to go up several flights of stairs if the person is disabled or has a small baby, but there are people who are healthier than me, younger than me and we walk up 4 or 5 floors...**

... and I leave the bike down there with only the wheel locked because I couldn't find anywhere to secure it to. My god, it's really difficult, you just have to pray a lot.

After a really bad day of orders here where I work, I went to the super-market to prepare lunchboxes for the week. I like to do them because

it makes the busy day-to-day bustle here in London easier, helps us save money and means that we eat better than if we ate out.

As for me, I never take a lunch break, I literally just swallow food to keep on working. I know it's a bad habit, but lost time means lost money.

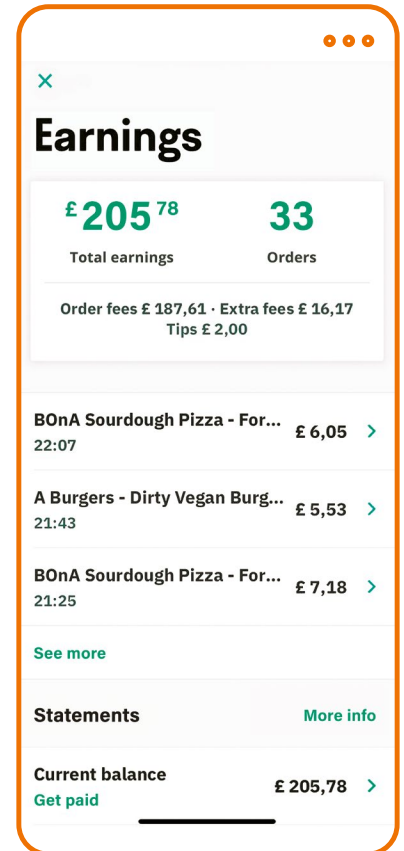


**The future is bright for those who don't give up.**

**In contrast to the difficult days, there are the GOOD days, those that make every second worthwhile, which show me what a hardworking woman I am.**

I am fighting to reach my goals and, despite all the adversity, I'm managing to meet my daily targets, always aiming for professional success and personal fulfilment. This is my mission every day when I get up and go to work! Reaching the end of the day with a feeling of accomplishment (target met). A boost of enthusiasm for all the other days to come!!

This day was an exception; to reach the £200 target I worked from 7am to 10pm non-stop.



It was a Sunday, I had coffee before I left home and ate fruit during the day while waiting at the waiting point. That day I didn't reject any delivery order, I accepted all of them regardless of the distance and I was also rotating in the waiting points. Besides, on this day the application was giving bonuses. It was an extremely tiring day and I consider it a victory.



The advantage of working as a delivery person is the feeling of control and freedom. I have a 3-year-old son who lives with me, he is at nursery 15 hours a week, so I organise my working hours around his schedule.

However, the feeling hasn't always been one of freedom...

When I arrived in London with my ex-husband and son, I went through physical and psychological abuse. I endured it because I wasn't working, I was financially dependent on him. I was afraid to leave and not be able to handle it. Until the last physical assault, when I decided to put an end to it. I got a room for myself and my son, I had to leave him with someone I barely knew because I had to work.

From that day on it hasn't been easy for me, we live in a very sexist society. When you decide to become an independent woman and not accept certain situations, hell, I work, I have my own money, so I don't have to deal with that, but even so they judge me.

Now I look in the mirror every day and repeat to myself that I will make it, I will handle it. If I'm in a bad situation, hopefully my son will understand and everything will work out in the end.



*To deal with this situation, as well as my financial independence, I needed my emotional independence. Will society one day be ready for independent women and will we ourselves be ready for this situation?*

HEAR MY VOICE



Today I took my motorcycle, my work partner for some TLC! She's the one who's with me every moment of every day, whether they're good or bad.

I pay for everything around here: fuel, servicing by mechanics, insurance, maintenance, parts, and equipment. Therefore, all care for my work partner is worth it and rewarding. With her help, I follow this delivery path towards my financial stability.



**It's worth remembering that we've explored London together from top to bottom, in search of a promising future, full of achievements.**

I still can't believe that after 7 years and everything I've been through in London, I'm still here and, as incredible as it may seem, I love this place more and more, and today I call it home. I always say that London is a Ferris wheel, one day we're at the

bottom and over the years we're moving upwards; eventually we will go back to the bottom, even if only for a short while, just to remind us where we came from and make us value the path that brought us here.



I stopped to  
take this photo  
to remind  
myself just how  
mature London  
had made me  
and made me  
the strong  
warrior woman  
I've become.

## CREDITS

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