

# Delivering Justice: Food Delivery Cyclists in New York City

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## Abstract

In New York City (NYC), food delivery cyclists ride the streets all day and night long to provide convenient, affordable, hot food to New Yorkers. These working cyclists are often Latino or Asian male immigrants who are situated within intersectional and interlocking systems of global migration and capital flows, intense time pressures by restaurants and customers, precarious tip-based livelihoods, an e-bike ban and broken windows policing, and unsafe streets designed for drivers. I approach this research through participatory action research (PAR) and *han*, an indigenous Korean word that describes collective transgenerational traumas that are rooted in systems and structures of oppression. A *han*-based PAR approach seeks to use participatory research methods with delivery workers to create communities of resistance and healing that name structural oppressions, to gain societal acknowledgement of these named oppressions, and to change structures and systems to undo oppressions and heal collective traumas. As a rationale for this work, I examine how echo chambers of whiteness craft demonizing public narratives about immigrant delivery workers by excluding worker voices. This exclusion signals a need to listen to delivery worker voices to characterize and name their conditions and experiences.

Intermingled systems of transnational migration, restaurant business, and labor conditions coerce competition, isolation, exploitation, and tactics for transnational survival that speed up the bodies of delivery workers to meet the demands of food delivery while also disposing of worker bodies that are too slow, old, or injured. Exacerbating this

disposability of worker bodies, unsafe streets are based upon a system of cumulative irresponsibility where mass harm accrues from the inability to address this harm through individual responsibility. This system undermines the right to the street for immigrant delivery workers by creating harmful conditions and criminalizing worker tactics for survival such as riding electric bikes (e-bikes) as disrupting social order. By being unable to address systematic and structural labor and street conditions that compel the speeding up of worker bodies, NYC has responded to “disorderly” immigrant delivery workers by excluding immigrant workers from the boundaries of legality and enacting broken windows policing. Accordingly, the City and NYPD have created a regime of Vision Zero Apartheid by racially weaponizing a public policy to reduce traffic fatalities by exerting punitive disciplinary measures against immigrant delivery workers in the name of public safety.

The transgressive, intersectional, and agentic movements of delivery workers expose the porosity of boundaries and trace out desire paths in the shifting cracks and crevices within oppressive systems. Traveling along desire paths involves risk, but also opens up possibilities of communities of resistance and healing that strive toward liberation as collective projects of delivering more just cities.