[Theme Music Intro]

Thimali:	Welcome to Season Three, Episode Six of Mothers of Invention, I'm the series producer of this beautiful show, Thimali Kodikara.
Mary:	I'm Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and currently Chair of the Elders.
Maeve:	And I'm Maeve Higgins. I'm a comedian, a writer and a world renowned expert on climate justice.
Mary:	Errrr, what?! Expert?
Maeve:	Yeah!
	[Laughter]
Mary:	World renowned? Who told you that, Maeve?
Maeve:	Well, I actually thought you might not notice I had slipped that in, but while we're on the subject, we're almost three seasons in. I think it's time I graduated to being a world renowned expert on climate justice.
	[Laughter]
Mary:	Ah come now, come now. You need your knowledge tested before you graduate, Maeve - you know that.

[Sound Effect - Bell Rings]

Thimali:	Uh, did somebody say pub quiz?
Mary:	Isn't it seven o'clock in the morning in New York? Uh, I know it's too early for a glass of wine, which I'm going to have very shortly. So I'll remind you of that, Quizmaster.
Maeve:	Never too early for a good time! Okay. Thimali, if you're serious about doing a quiz, I am so ready.

Thimali: I love a quiz, Who doesn't love a quiz? It just so happens, I'm going to pull these questions out of my back pocket. You have 10 seconds to jot down your answers. Are you ready?

Mary: Okay.

Maeve: Yeah.

Thimali: All right, then let's begin. Question one. What is a just transition?

[Sound Effect - Clock Ticking]

Maeve: Okay. Can I confer with Mary or, no?

Thimali: No!

Mary: You know what's happening. She's busy looking up on Google already. Let's not fool ourselves.

[Group Laughter]

Thimali: So much trust!

Maeve: And copy and paste. Just transition. No problem.

[Sound Effects - Bell Rings]

Thimali: All right. Question two. You ready? What constitutes a triple bottom line?

[Sound Effect - Clock Ticking]

Mary: Yeah. It's about time you found out about this Maeve, so Google away. Come on, quick!

Maeve: I actually might. If you don't mind, I might. I do not know.

[Laughter]

Sounds shady.

Thimali: No rude answers. Definitely no rude answers.

Maeve: Triple bottom line? God.

[Sound Effects - Bell Rings]

Thimali: Okay. Question three. What is a cooperative?

[Sound Effect - Clock Ticking]

Maeve: Okay, good.

Mary: Yeah, you know, I think, Maeve might know something about this, but I'm not sure.

Maeve: Yeah because I'm so cooperative on this show.

[Group Laughter]

Okay, I know this one. Excellent.

[Sound Effects - Bell Rings]

Thimali: All right. That's it. That's all you're getting. Time's up, ladies, pens down. We'll share your answers at the end of the episode.

Maeve: I do have like some sense of where this is headed because all of these questions are related to economics. Correct?

Mary: I think this may have been entrapment Maeve. I think we've just arrived at our new economics episode. What do you think?

Maeve: Um-hum. We fell for it again.

Thimali: How exactly do you both not know me by now?

[Music Transition]

Thimali: So, the reason I wanted to look at new economics in this episode is because I personally have absolutely had it up to here with white patriarchal extractive capitalism.

Mary: I know what you mean. And I obviously am not in favour of that either, but I think we need to recognize that many people are very critical of the way capitalism has developed. The gross inequality, the white nature of it, the privileged nature of it and many people, including business leaders are now thinking about the time for a reset. And they're looking at a much broader way of still having a capitalist system, which they are supportive of. And what they're looking at is a system that supports a nature-based solutions that supports fair return for all in an enterprise. So I do think we're at a point where we're seeing the worst of an 'extractive white capitalism' as you said, but I think we have to remember, there are a lot of really good thinkers, both in business, in academia, in entrepreneurship who are moving in the direction of wanting change.

Thimali: Yeah it's an important point to think about Mary.

Maeve: Yeah.

Thimali: Well, I appreciate the economics can seem quite intimidating as a topic of conversation, but all it boils down to is the acquisition and distribution of resources and all the resources we have on our planet come from either land or labour, right.

Like, take a slice of bacon, for example. A piglet has to be born from a healthy mother and raised on a well kept farm and then fed with food that's not necessarily grown on the same farm that the pigs live on. Then when the piglet's old enough, it's sent to a slaughter house where a worker has to kill it. And it's meat is stored somewhere then cured, maybe smoked. And depending on the quality of meat, perhaps it's injected with water and other chemicals for flavour or lengthier storage. And it's packed in plastic film, driven in an industrial truck by a truck driver to warehouses up and down an entire region. And the bacon is stocked up by supermarket workers, kept in refrigeration units, until it's purchased. And then finally cooked on a gas or electric stove for Sunday breakfast. So making your purchase using a few notes of currency makes all those things invisible for us, but they are still there nonetheless.

Maeve: Wow.

Mary: You know, I, I do like the way you've broken it down, Thimali.

Maeve: Yeah it's incredible.

Mary: We all like to be able to get a bargain, to buy, for example, cheap clothes. But if we buy very cheap clothes, we can be fairly sure that they involve, probably in somewhere like Vietnam or Bangladesh, bad worker practices, maybe even child labour, women forced to work - not allowed to go to the lavatory, for example, which we hear a lot about.

Thimali: Yeah, right.

Mary: Then the goods are put on an airplane, so you have those emissions.

Thimali: Well said.

Maeve: I mean, it's a great way of putting it, Thimali. But the thing that consumers always seem to be stuck with is this weight of guilt from buying products they actually kind of need to get by. And it's not fair because we all have to eat, like despite how the food gets to us and some of us, we have to use fossil fuel run transportation - there’s not another option. And of course it's such a privilege to be in a position to buy organic food or to drive a hybrid car, so I dunno like, what I'm saying I suppose is that we need to make sure we don't blame people who are already doing their best, you know, because the onus isn't on individual consumers. It's up to our government. It's up to companies, corporate responsibility to actually engage the level of consciousness that we need to protect people and the planet.

Mary: I actually completely agree with Maeve that this should not be a blame game.

Mary: But when governments do take action, they also have to do it fairly. You remember when President Macron in 2018...

Thimali: Yeah of France.

Mary: Decided to have a fuel tax and he was doing it for the right reasons, but in the wrong way, because he'd already abolished a wealth tax and he had a fuel tax, which wasn't at all fair. It wasn't fair on farmers. It wasn't fair on commuters who had to travel to work and it was perceived to be unfair.

Thimali: So in the spirit of the season's rally cry, we need to build back better. And that's why we need to give a proper look at what system change solutions could look like.

[Music Transition]

Thimali: So I'm very honored to have our next guest with us this week. A professor at the University of Manchester in England, Bina Agarwal is a developmental economist who lives between England and Delhi, India. But she's been the President of the International Society for Ecological Economics, the President of the International Association for Feminist Economics. And so very much more than ought to be squeezed into this tiny opener. So please welcome to Mothers of Invention, Bina Agarwal.

Maeve: Welcome, welcome, Dr Agarwal.

Mary: Hi Bina, welcome. Lovely to see you.

Bina: Thank you.

Mary: I have lots of memories of quite a number of visits to New Delhi. The first was when I was President of Ireland. And it's the only time when I didn't see the crowds as much because they were kind of swept to the side.

Bina: Right. *[Laughter]*

Mary: In a way I didn't fully agree with. But since then, I do remember, you know, huge crowds and a sense of life. And I was so upset when I saw the migration out because of COVID.

Bina: Indeed.

Mary: That was really a very startling indication of what COVID can be like in a country like India.

Bina: Absolutely.

Bina: I, you know, I've spent most of my life in Delhi.

Maeve: Yeah.

Bina: I wasn't born in, in, in Delhi. But since I was, uh, three years old. I went to school here and I went to college, partly in India and partly in England, I was an undergraduate in Cambridge. I was quite young then I went when I was about 17.

Maeve & Thimali (In Unison): Oh my goodness. *[Laughter]*

Bina: Yeah. I went to college quite early. I was 15 or so when I went to college, so I had a degree when I went to Cambridge.

Thimali: Oh my god. Okay. Now we know what we're dealing with here.

[Group Laughter]

Maeve: You know, how did you get to be on this path towards kind of becoming a feminist ecological economist? Like, was there a moment that you can point to in your childhood or was it something that came later?

Bina: There are several steps to this story. I have a special connection with trees. When I was 11 years old, um, we used to live in this bungalow with a back garden. So I remember saving a mango tree. Its branches being totally lopped off. So at the age of 11, I heard the sound of the axes and I went out and I saw these two men who were cutting off most of the branches. I shouted to them and said: “You can't do that! You don't have permission from the forest department, you can't cut down all of this tree.” And I just stood there. And they said, “Oh, were only trimming it”. I said: “No, you will kill it!” And then I was silent. I just stood there and I didn't move. And they were very disquieted. So they came down and they let the tree be, and it's still standing.

Thimali: Yay! *[Laughter].* So it’s really in your bones

Bina: Right! *[Laughter]*

Bina: Umm, when it came to choosing a subject for college, uh, in India, I thought I would either do Physics Honours or English literature. And my father with whom, you know, I was very close to him, so he sat me down and he said, look, let's think through this because there aren't that many options for women in physics if you get a job later and you can always read good fiction.

[Laughter]

So have you, so have you thought of economics?

Maeve: Wow.

Bina: And um, uh, and it's, uh, it's scientific and you can always tell a good story.

Maeve: Yeah.

Bina: So, um, I decided to take up economics. My awareness of gender inequalities goes back, much into childhood. When I was quite young and my both sets of grandparents, but particularly my mother's parents continued to live in a village in Rajasthan. So when I visited, they were quite prosperous, but you could see that there were, um, there were inequalities in how girls were treated and the lack of physical mobility of women in the village in Rajasthan and also they were caste inequalities. So I remember when I was about 15, we were asked to speak on any subject and I remember speaking on women's rights. I remember saying, "And when we have the right to vote, let's all vote for women."

Maeve: Wow.

Mary: *[Laughter]* Not bad for a 15 year old.

Thimali: Yeah, not bad at all.

[Music Sting]

Mary: And you put a particular emphasis on women's land rights. Tell us a bit about that.

Bina: So after my PhD, I finished my PhD when I was about 27, 28. It was at that point looking at Asia and Africa, that women farmers faced, uh, serious constraints particularly because they did not own land. Information about new seeds, uh, fertilizers, markets, et cetera, all went to those who were landowners.

Bina: And when I, uh, began to seriously research this, um, and out of that research, my book, *A Field of One's Own*, came out. It covered five countries in South Asia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. But, uh, at that point, uh, there was very, very little work on women's land rights, I taught myself inheritance law - for all five countries. If you have a piece of land, it makes a big difference to your risk of poverty or even destitution. Uh, say if you have a marital breakdown, you become a widow, you, you get a divorce. So the idea that if your father, or if your husband owns land, uh, or property, you are safe and secure, uh, needs to be challenged because there are a lot of inequalities within the household. Um, so it's important for welfare. Also, if mothers own assets, immovable assets, like land, then you find the child, survival, education and health for

children is much better than if the father alone owns assets.

Maeve: Really?

Bina: Well, women tend to have, different, priorities in terms of how they spend their incomes. They are much more likely to spend the incomes on family needs rather than on themselves. Uh, and there is a huge amount of evidence on this, um, uh, globally.

Thimali: I did want to ask you Bina, because you have two very strong fields of research around community forestry and cooperative farming, um, amongst rural women in particular. Um, and both concepts seem like they are absolutely groundbreaking, excuse the pun there, but...

[Laughter]

Bina: Thank you! I'm glad you brought this up because this, if you look at forests, they're common property. So this book of mine, *Gender and Green Governance*, which came out in 2010, was asking the question if women were members of groups and committees, which were managing forests. What difference would it make? And this came out of an earlier - I'd written an earlier book which came out in 1986 called *Cold Hearts and Barren Slopes,* where I'd argued that if you want to preserve forests globally, you have to see communities not as predators, but as protectors of forests. And, uh, what we were finding was that if it was managed by the forest department, they would set up guards who would patrol the area, but local people were continuing to use it because one guard is not - if you, if the community doesn't agree, then they can always sneak in and take firewood and fodder and timber and so on.

Maeve: Right.

Bina: There was a big change - 1990, in India, 1993 in Nepal, um, the government gave over degraded forest land to local communities to manage and said, you make the rules of forest use. So the communities then made very detailed rules. So in my book I have very fine tuned rules. If you want to collect firewood - can you go in at all? If you can go in for how many days? So the idea was that the communities could extract sustainably from the forest. Because you make the rules, you're more likely not to break the rules.

Thimali: And in fact, it ended up being the latter where the forest

ended up thriving with this system of community forestry, basically.

Bina: Exactly. What is important is also that it showed up at the macro level. So with satellite data, you know, between 1991, 2001 forest area increased by 3.6 million hectares in terms of forest cover.

Maeve: Wow.

Thimali: As a result of community forestry?

Bina: That seemed to be the, one of the most important factors.

Thimali: Wow.

Bina: I think there's a very important link between, uh, community cooperation and conservation.

Thimali: Right.

Maeve: Um-hum.

Thimali: Yeah I got into this lovely rabbit hole whilst researching this episode. It got me wondering if we could measure the success of our economy by something, you know - a little less cold than the Gross Domestic Product otherwise known as GDP. Because GDP is a measure of growth from the production of goods and services, but it doesn't include unvalued labour like care work.

Bina: That's right.

Thimali: Um, but then I discovered that the former French President, had commissioned an unprecedented report in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crash to ask that very same question. And that you were one of only two women of 25 leading economists located all over the world who were asked to explore this very question. So I was wondering could you tell us more about that study and share some of your findings with us?

Bina: It had several Nobel laureates, I think it's six or seven Nobel laureates. It was led by, uh, Joseph Stiglitz, um, who won the Nobel prize in economics...

Maeve: Yes.

Bina: And also Amartya Sen.

Thimali: Yup.

Bina: Um, and there were many other, uh, uh, large minds, um,

in it. Uh, so Nancy Folbre and I were the only two women. I think I was the only person actually physically based in the Global South.

Thimali: Wow!

Maeve: You're the one with the experience on the ground who like spends an entire year going and collecting measurements of, like, what's happening on farms.

[Laughter]

So I'm really glad you were there, doing.

Thimali: Yeah.

Bina: Thank you. Um, so that was actually, it was a report written over a little over a year. Each of us wrote up different parts of it. There was one section which was about, uh, standard GDP, but what it doesn't measure. So for instance, um, Care Work - Nancy Folbre was particularly instrumental in pushing for that. Another section which was on, on wellbeing, uh, and welfare. And I was a part of that group. And the third was on the question of environment, uh, environmental degradation. I think there's a general agreement, that GDP per capita is not a good metric for measuring human welfare.

Thimali: Right.

Mary: And in particular it also doesn't measure, uh, the, the harm to nature, the lack of sustainability.

Bina: Exactly, Mary.

Mary: And I think the report came up with the concept of green GDP. Can you speak a little to that?

Bina: Well green GDP simply means that you take the standard GDP and factor in the environmental costs of economic growth, such as loss of biodiversity or the adverse effects you can attribute to climate change. But the real challenge is in quantifying these environmental costs, since many of the benefits that nature provides are not marketed, they're not tradable. So it's quite difficult to give them a monetary value. And there can be a wide range of assumptions that people don't

necessarily agree on regarding how you might quantify the loss.

Thimali: Totally yeah. That is such a critical point to end the conversation on Bina, thank you. I know I want to keep following your work, but how can out listeners do that too?

Bina: I have a website. It's called www Bina Agarwal dot com.

Bina: B I N A A G A R W A L dot com.

Thimali: Got it.

Mary: And Bina, we're very keen that all our Mothers of Invention kind of know of each other and know of each other's stories.

Bina: That would be wonderful.

Mary: And it really has been wonderful to talk with you because you are so impressive. From the age of 11 - until you got your early degrees, until you - what did you not do?! But you know, it's, it's great to see how grounded you are. You know, you're grounded in the reality of women's lives, which I like very much. So well done.

Bina: Thank you very much. Thank you. And it's, it's a great honour to meet you, Mary and all of you. And I would love to be in touch with the other Mothers of Invention.

Mary: Good.

Thimali: You will be, you will be. Definitely.

[Music Transition]

Thimali: This week, this week soundscape is a very special treat for you, Maeve, cause it arrived from our very own neighbourhood in Brooklyn, New York.

Maeve: Oh, nice. That's saved me now from doing my own one. That's actually really handy.

Thimali: Oh for goodness sake. *[Laughter]* Well let's have a listen to Katipai, who lives in Park Slope with her partner Max and their French bulldog, Totes.

[SOUNDSCAPE AUDIO]

[Flautists play 'Flutes En Vacances' by Jacques Casterede. Dog whines.]

Katipai: I'm originally from New Zealand but I've lived in New York city for 20 years. I own a cocktail bar and we were mandated to close in the middle of March. The pandemic has had many chapters of sound for me. Initially, it was the resounding silence as everybody retreated inside. Then came the sirens, which were howling 24 hours a day. Then came the clapping for the essential workers. Then there was the death of George Floyd and the surrounding protests. And so with that came the looming, ever present noise of the helicopters. Throughout all this, as summer kind of bloomed, I noticed that there were, these magical sounds coming from our backyard. It sounded like somebody had like set up a massive sound system and was just blasting classical music. But upon investigation, it turns out that it's a small group of flautists that because of COVID, haven't had access to practice spaces or been able to play together and doors. And so that kind of taken it to the back yard and every weekend they get together and have a jam session and it's beautiful and amazing and.... Totes can't bear not having attention, not on him. So with the utmost confidence that only an amateur can have decided to join in while I was trying to record these guys for you. And it makes me very happy. It became this reminder that like, but there's still joy in our infinite present.

[SOUNDSCAPE AUDIO ENDS]

Maeve: Oh, that's so much fun. I love that. I'm not crazy about flutes, but when they're all played in a big group, it makes them way better.

Mary: I must say it's really quite lovely to hear such a fun soundscape, but with a lot of thought in it after seeing so much sadness and near despair in New York City.

Thimali: Yeah. You said it, Mary. I mean, as of today's recording, 23,782 New Yorkers died from COVID-19 and you know, how can we ever thank our healthcare workers for what they did to cap that number, right? But you can really see it scarred the hearts of so many people here and so it's still taken very seriously, um, I think Maeve will agree. But it's such a resilient place. And I think Katipai's soundscape is completely reflective of that. Because there'll always be an urge to persist with laughter and music and I guess in this case, some howling as well! But I'm really proud to live in this city, I really am.

Maeve: Yeah.

[Music Transition]

Thimali: It is no small decision when we invite a gentleman to join the ranks of Mothers of Invention. But I think everybody is going to agree that our next guest is working hard to earn his credentials as a feminist. Omar Freilla is the founder of green worker cooperatives and it's a black led women run powerhouse, providing immigrants and communities of colour, a local green and democratic cooperative economy in the South Bronx, New York. So welcome, Omar!

Maeve: Hi Omar! Welcome!

Omar: Thank you all. Thanks for having me on.

Mary: Warm welcome Omar, delighted to see you.

Omar: Hello, Madam President!

Mary: On this show. It's Mary, so don't worry. *[Laughter]*

Maeve: I go by queen Maeve. I actually go by Queen Maeve if you don't mind.

[Group Laughter]

Mary: See what I mean? See what I mean? *[Laughter]*

Maeve: But just try and act normal around me, Omar. You are gonna feel a little bit star struck and intimidated, I know Mary does.

[Group Laughter]

Omar: I'll do my best. I'll do my best.

Maeve: Thank you.

Maeve: Are you in the South Bronx right now? Is that where you're from too?

Omar: Grew up raised, still here. Yes.

Maeve: What was it like growing up there? I only got to New York seven years ago.

Omar: You know, I grew up in the Seventies, To the world, this

was a place that became infamous for burning buildings. But for me it was, you know, it's a playground, it's where, where I grew up and where there are lots of people, you know, working, uh, to live their lives and do good. And you know, it, it was a place though that it really shaped the work that I do and who I am. And, uh, you know, I had said that it was, it was a place that was known for burning, uh, which was actually landlords burning buildings in order to collect insurance payments.

Group: Wow.

Omar: And that information came out later. But, you know, it's, it's us, who are people in the community who were blamed for, for burning buildings.

Maeve: Wow. That's so interesting because looking in from the outside and there's all these like movies and music about like, The Bronx in the Eighties - the impression you got was that it was this chaotic place.

Omar: Absolutely. It's, it's frustrating. And it makes you angry. It makes me angry. Hearing this point of view, this perspective that we were somehow responsible for the neighbourhood being, in a bad condition. I grew up right alongside the Cross Bronx Expressway, which is the main highway that cuts right through the middle of the Bronx. And, um, you know, and it was the construction of that highway in the Fifties and Sixties that led to a lot of the downward spiral of the Bronx.

Thimali: It's a common story I think, in a lot of New York City, uh neighbourhoods. like a highway comes through, splits the community in half and then all kinds of crime and social deterioration start happening.

Omar: Yep. You know, it's done in the communities that have the least access to power and can fight back. And so it's low income communities and communities of colour. Even then, I remember being 10 years old, looking out over the highway at the buildings on the other side of the highway and in my, my neighbourhood.

Omar: And seeing that a lot of the buildings, buildings that had been empty had been vacant, uh, with empty windows had been boarded up. They were painted with images of what a window would look like. Uh, so you would see a fake window with a, you know, an image of a potted plant or a silhouette. And then you realize, you know, I realize that, it's there, not for us. It's there for the people driving on the highway. Clear message for me then that stuck with me was, was ‘they don't care about us’. I

didn't know who 'they' were, but they were, whoever made the decision that it was better to spend the money, on covering up this building than to actually fix it up. All of the buildings.

Mary: And Omar, where did you see, you know, kind of opening up for change?

Omar: Well, what I saw then, and this was some, what stuck with me is that it was always people, in my community doing things, running organizations starting up programs, music programs, art programs, after school things, things that, that kept me and other young people at the time involved and engaged.

Mary: And did you get much support? Was there availability of support for community activities like that?

Omar: Well, you're asking me from the perspective of a, you know a 12 year old kid. So I didn't know anything about funding and what I knew was that there were people in my community, you know, women and men, mostly women, who were really staking claim in their neighbourhoods. You know, I had heard about community gardens. People were organizing and just, and taking over vacant lots, turning them into gardens into what, you know, became the biggest, you know, biggest experiment in New York City at the time of people taking collective ownership of land and you know putting it into production to meet their own needs and, and really just creating spaces where people can be people.

Omar: So as a, as a kid, you know, my, my mother always, um, encouraged me and, and she was always super curious in the environment. And we were always watching, uh, nature shows on TV. Old, white, British men, talking about the cheetahs, I watched all of those and I had this, this idea, you know, I wanted to go there. I wanted to do, do good work and, and be encouraged in science. And so I went that route, you know, you know I studied biology and environmental science. But at the same time, I was exposed to the environmental justice movement. I saw in it, a place that combined my passion with the environment and with science, but also with the passion that I had for social justice.

Omar: And so I had left the Bronx, went away to college, to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, historically black male college. So when I got to Morehouse, just the year that the Rodney King verdict came out, which was 1990, 1992. So I started the fall before then.

Thimali: Could you explain the importance of the Rodney King, L.A Riots for our listeners? Because they live all over the world.

Omar: Yeah, definitely. And especially in relation to now. The spring of 1992 in April, uh, Rodney King, uh, a black man lived in, in Los Angeles had been beaten by the police several months before. I believe it was the first instance where a beating by police had been recorded. And so that the video of that had come out. And, and, uh, in April, the jury had come to a decision and that decision was not, not guilty for the police who had beaten Rodney King.

Omar: That evening that the verdict came out, people were out in the streets, uh, myself and many others. The next morning, myself, a large number of other students had gotten together someone's apartment. We organized a rally that about 5,000 people came out and, for two days it was a battle between the police and residents and students.

Thimali: And Atlanta's a very black city too right. So, like it really hit culturally.

Omar: Yes, absolutely. And the mayor was black. The police force was, was largely black, but the same dynamics were still there. Uh, out of that came an organization. We had founded an organization and the organizing of that called Students for African American Empowerment. I'm not African American. I am black, my family's from Dominican Republic, but, you know, I was in Atlanta. So, you know, we, we formed this. In the spirit of Pan-Africanism and really building, building a movement. So, we saw ourselves as the new incarnation of, of, SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee of the Sixties. And we were mostly students, but also inspired by the Black Panther Party. And so over time, I, had been influenced and became aware of black feminism and, uh, the writings of Bell Hooks and Patricia Hill Collins and, uh, and got challenged by other women who were part of the organization and who were seeing that this organization that had a commitment to being, uh, anti sexist still was creating an environment that was very, had become very macho and was reducing the spaces, you know for women to really take leadership and ownership in the organization.

Omar: And, uh, at that time I had started to experiment with the

idea of cooperatives and had learned about cooperatives and that wound up getting, you know - shoved in the back because I wound up leaving that organization in order to form an organization to explicitly challenge men, black men in particular, because it's the community that I was in. And so I founded an organization called Black Men for the Eradication of Sexism on the college campus at Morehouse. So it was the first time that that had something like that had happened. And so it was an opportunity, you know, we were busy, challenging, you know, a lot of ideas that were out there, but also, but also raising consciousness on the campus and beyond about the need for men to, too step up and challenge our own sexism and, you know, our own involvement.

Mary: I'm fascinated because, a) you've done something that not many men's groups do - you formed two different groups. And one of them was a tough one, you know, to, to talk about black men for the eradication of sexism, that really, that's leadership. And secondly, I just want to know how you linked with the National Black Women's Health Project in Atlanta.

Omar: Uh, it wasn't a formal relationship. It was more like, you know, there, there are people that you see doing incredible work. And so you say, okay, yeah, I see, I see the power and the value in what they're doing. And so they were definitely people who influenced the work that we were doing. And so hearing, their take on, uh, what is now called intersectionalism, and, you know, recognising just the places where sexism and racism and classism come together and their effect on health and on women's bodies, and also in turn on, on men and just how, how we relate to ourselves and our own bodies and each other, and our feelings and emotions and all of that, that there was, there was a lot of work to be done.

Mary: That's just extraordinary. I'm, I'm so taken - at the time too, you know, in the Nineties - that this was happening. And I, I just wonder, because this is the key question for our economics session now. You know, what is it about modern capitalism that you didn't like and don't like?

Omar: These days, uh, and for the past 16 years, I have been, working and founded and am part of an organization called Green Worker Cooperatives. And we help people to start out worker-owned businesses and worker cooperatives. And the reason we do it is because we see it as a transition out of capitalism. And to do it in a

way that puts people at the centre of an economy. Capitalist structure and the structure of capitalist businesses, the, the very nature of ownership in a capitalist business is that ownership is for those who invest money. Control of that business, decision making goes to this outside person, or persons, that put money into the business. Even though they're not doing any of the work. And so the value is considered to be the investment of money in, in an enterprise, not the labour that actually created that, that wealth.

[Music Sting]

Maeve: So Green Workers Cooperative. Could you explain the cooperative part? And what's different about that?

Omar: Yeah. So in a, in a cooperative, what you have is that it, a

cooperative is, is a business. It's an enterprise that's owned by its members. And in the case of a worker cooperative, you're talking about an enterprise that's owned by its workers, the people who are actually working in the business. So you walk into a large supermarket, that has say a hundred people that are working there. They would all be co-owners of this enterprise. So what that means is that whatever surplus, whatever money or profits is generated by that business goes to them, whatever decision making comes from them.

Mary: Omar, how many, workers cooperatives are there now in New York City?

Omar: Now we have over 120 you know, about a third of that, 120 are ones that have come through us, come through our organisation. And so, you know, we've been part of a movement to really grow, to grow the numbers and have lots more worker cooperatives in New York City.

Maeve: It's so impressive and it's small and it's local. Is there a way to scale it up? Like could, um, an entire city be run this way, could a nation be run this way? What do you think?

Omar: Well, that's our intention. That's a, that's definitely our goal! You know, it's, it definitely can be scaled up. Worker ownership is not new. Cooperatives are not new. This is, this is an ancient practice, uh, people coming together to meet their own needs and creating cooperative societies, mutual aid efforts. All of those are things that happen, particularly in moments of crisis and

moments of crisis like this. And so in - and it's been in moments of crisis when we've seen massive increases in interest and growth of the sector.

Thimali: Isn't it true that the city of New York actually did become involved in investing in your work, in and in cooperative businesses?

Omar: Did and still are, yes.

Thimali: That's great.

Omar: It's been now six years that, Green Worker Cooperatives in partnership with other organisations around the city, uh, successfully got the city of New York to invest in worker cooperative development in particular. And so now on average, the city has been investing a little over $3 million a year in supporting the development and growth of worker cooperatives.

Thimali: That's brilliant.

Mary: I want to ask you an important question. Why in your view is women's leadership important in this work?

Omar: Oh my God. Um, when you look at, uh, participation of women in worker cooperatives as owners and then of course, as leaders, then we see a dramatic shift in how, how businesses are structured and who, who's in them. So worker cooperatives just across the board are overwhelmingly women. Um, the, the cooperatives that have come through us are overwhelmingly women, I'd say about 75% women. Many are you know exclusively women. And, you know, that's because, women are coming together, men and women, trans are coming together, creating businesses to meet their own needs. You've got businesses that are actually connected to the communities that they're part of and women are running those businesses. Then it's no accident, those businesses are going to be more responsive to the communities that they're a part of.

Thimali: Totally, yeah.

Maeve: Well, it's been so wonderful to hear from you and how can our listeners follow along with, with your work and the Green Worker Cooperative?

Omar: Yeah. So, anyone who wants to learn more about Green Worker Cooperatives, you can follow us on Instagram and you can follow us on Facebook, uh, Green Worker Cooperatives on both. You can certainly

find us on the web at Green Worker dot Co-pp, that's dot C O O P. Co-op is an extension for cooperatives and those that love and work with Co-ops.

Thimali: You're a legend, Omar.

Maeve: Thank you, Omar.

Mary Thank you, Omar.

[Music Transition]

Thimali: I really believe that creating a new future is only really possible if you can visualise what it looks like first. But sometimes that's easier said than done, you know. But Bina and Omar are from such different viewpoints in the world, but are both exploring, not just theoretical, but really practical ways we can care for people and planet while getting those things done.

Maeve: Yeah. I agree with you about, um, understanding what it looks like before we can get there. But I also think, in both Bina and Omar's cases, that they started to take steps before they knew exactly where they were headed. If you know what I mean?

Thimali: Mmmm, yeah. That's really well put.

Mary: Yeah and they both were very well grounded in what they wanted to achieve, which was working cooperatively, working for, uh, not just the individual, but the collective. And, I particularly liked the way Omar was very comfortable talking about what he learned from feminism and the importance of women's leadership. And, he was, he was really very thoughtful about it. And I thought that Bina, brought a huge amount of learning to, evidence-based verifying, you know, getting out there.

Maeve: And you know, I think after hearing both of them, remember we did that, the quiz at the top, the pop quiz, I feel like I got the answers, right.

Mary: Well, you are making progress Maeve, you know, you're, you're smart.

Maeve: Ayyyy! Thank you!

Mary: But, I think you'll have to do better to be classified as a climate expert all the same. But you're coming along,

Thimali: Well, I believe in you, Maeve. You can do it!

Maeve: Thanks, Thimali.

Thimali: Well, question one was what is a just transition? Well, a just transition is a set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power. So we can shift from an extractive economy where we just take and take to a regenerative economy where we can take care of our needs and the planet at the same time. How'd you think you did?

Maeve: Um, I had that.

[Group Laughter]

Yep, yep, that's right. Well done, Thimali, correct! I knew it was about getting away from kind of an extractive towards the regenerative. I thought that just part was something to do with the workers, as well as in, say the famous example of, coal miners that you don't just take away the job, you provide them with training and options for, um, a different type of career. Something like that.

Mary: Yeah, you know you are right there, you are right there, Maeve. When we're talking to the climate context, we're talking about moving out of fossil fuel, but remembering the workers that helped us to build our economies. It's also auto workers when we move to electric cars, for example, and there will be others who will be losers, but we have to make sure that we have a system where they're retrained, where they're with a part of the future, because they're given an opportunity rather than just left out.

Maeve: Yeah. I get a point?

Mary: Errrm, a point.

Maeve: One point.

Thimali: A point! A point!

Mary: Out of 10.

[Group Laughter]

Thimali: Alright, question two, question two. What is a triple bottom line?

Maeve: Okay. For this one I wrote down IDK. Which means, I

don't know.

[Group Laughter]

I'm sorry, I passed. My triple bottom line was three letters. IDK, I don't know!

Thimali: Alright, Mary. What do you think?

Mary: It's a sustainability accounting framework and that includes the social environmental and the financial. And now in business, it's often ESG. Economic, Social and Governance that they talk about, you know, so it's common phraseology.

Thimali: Alright. Finally, question three. What is a cooperative?

Maeve: Okay so, do you remember the extremely great definition that we got from, Omar?

Thimali: I do, yeah.

Maeve: So I didn't get that. I kind of thought it was...

[Group Laughter]

I just understood a cooperative to be more like owners of factories or owners of supermarkets or owners of any business sharing with the employees. Which I guess shows how indoctrinated I am. I just didn't think of it. That there would be no capitalist involvement.

Thimali: Right, right.

Maeve: Whereas he was very clear that cooperatives are worker run and, you know, worker led from the bottom up.

Thimali: Yeah. From the bottom up, exactly.

Mary: You know, I am actually quite impressed Maeve, I think I will be officially graduating you.

Thimali: It only took you two years, Maeve you did it!

Mary: I don't know what letters you put behind your name, but go ahead.

Maeve: IDK!

Thimali: Those are the letters after your name now.

Maeve: I'm going to be Maeve Higgins IDK. But that's wonderful

because it's just in time for our final episode.

Mary: Yeah. And I'm really sad about that. I must say, because this really has been a fantastic season, Thimali and more credit to you and the team. We needed to get to the guts of climate action and climate justice. And we did. We've met with truly exceptional mothers this season. And I must say I've learned a lot.

Maeve: Yeah. I kind of knew all this stuff all the time, but it was nice to hear it again.

Mary: Come on, Maeve. I knew I shouldn't have graduated you!

[Group Laughter]

Maeve: It's been huge for me. And I have to say, having been party to these conversations and to all of this learning that I've been doing at this time in the world and in the city that I live in, where things are completely upended and it can feel very chaotic. But we have all of these women who are shining lights on various ways forwards. And I include you in that Mary too, of course, and Thimali, and all the team. Thank you for finding these, these women and Omar to act, to act as guides, you know, it's been extremely useful for me.

Thimali: Yep.

Mary: Very much agree. And Thimali, where does this leave us now for our big season finale?

Thimali: Yes, this final episode is a really special one and it remains a surprise! But this close to the US Presidential election, I guarantee it will be one to remember. Um, but in the meanwhile, our fantastic friend, climate essayist, Mary Annaise Hegler, um, is talking to me on a brilliant minisode coming up next week. And on Instagram, you can learn how our mothers and other climate leaders are de-stressing in very creative ways in our self care Sundays. And if that isn't enough, I'll be doing this week's episode recap with your friend, Mary - Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who is not only an economist, but the former President of Liberia.

Mary: Well, Thimali now be on your best behavior with president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. She's a very good friend, but she's some formidable woman and she'll want her facts right and she'll want everything on cue and you know, as she should.

Maeve: Don’t embarrass Mary, Thimali.

Thimali: So no pressure then. Yeah don’t show up Mary Robinson, put it on my to-do list. Check, check check check. Got it.

[Music Transition]

Mary: Mothers of Invention is brought to you by Vulcan Productions and Doc Society. Our series producer is Thimali Kodikara.

Maeve: Our development producer is Shanida Scotland, our minisode producer is Lauren Armstrong-Carter, our minisode field recordist is Reva Goldburg and our episode editor is Sefa Nkyi.

Our minisode editor is Alexis Adimora and our sound designer is Sami El-Enany.

Mary: Our line producer is Rebecca Lucy Mills. Our engineer is Lisa Hack. Our social media strategist is Imriel Morgan for Content is Queen. Our impact producer is Quan Lateef-Hill. Our partnerships lead is Misha Nestor and Aisha Younis oversees our satellite project, Climate Reframe for BAME Climate Leaders in the UK.

Maeve: The executive producers are Jodi Allan, Ruth Johnston, Matt Milios, Jess Search and Beadie Finzi. Team Vulcan is Andrea Dramer, Susan Grella, Kimberly Nyhouse, Alex Pearson and Ted Richane.

Thimali: Katipai's soundscape featured flautists, Amy Cohen, Paul Lucien Kulka and April Klavins of the flute choir of New York. And for those wondering the piece they are playing is *Flutes En Vacances* composed by Jacques Casterede.

Mary: Our theme tune is written by Jamie Perera and we are proudly distributed by PRX.

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