Poem: *Doba*—Trobiand Skirts

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Sun-bleached banana leaves
split down to fibres, layered
and fringed. Plant life transformed,
woven on human loom. Women’s
hands work fibres into skirts,
valuables in matrilineal exchange.

Continuity through exchange
of one form for another. Leaves
rustle in island breeze, skirts
flutter like sunspots through layers
of green, whispering the motion of women,
the lore of nature transformed.

Skirts tell of clan life transformed,
chart history through reciprocal exchange.
From death to rebirth, children of women
move in a spiral. From leaves
to skirts, life becomes layered
with meaning. Feathered skirts

of deep seed powder red, skirts
made in mourning when death transforms
the living into spirits at sea. Layers
of skirts piled high for exchange,
passed from one clan to another, leave
behind the sorrowful keen as women’s

voices are lifted of grief. Women
dance in full plumage, skirts
flared from their hips. Leaves shimmer in motion, transformed by colour, jubilation, by the exchange of tears for a feast; by layers of colour—purple, green, yellow; layers of voices in harmonious song. Women gather together to exchange news and stories, wearing hand-sewn skirts of calico and ribbon. Spirit transformed, life renewed, sorrow mutely leaves.

Layers of fibres woven into colourful skirts by women whose work tells of life transformed in exchange, in the breath of banana leaves.

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