

# Poem: *Doba*—Tro브리анд Skirts

Katherine Lepani

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

SINUOUS OBJECTS

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.

1991

This text is taken from *Sinuous Objects: Revaluing Women's Wealth in the Contemporary Pacific*, edited by Anna-Karina Hermkens and Katherine Lepani, published 2017 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.