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hawakan mo ang dila mo

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Hawakan mo ang dila mo

Monique Enriquez

This language pumps the lifeblood
of settlers that came
to rip out tongues
and try to clean US out
with soap;
and it reminds me
of how mom
tried the same,
wanting to wash the anger I felt
with her own.

And when my mouth exploded,
and when years of an aching stomach
became the truth in the lies
that mom and I were fed:
that papaya soap—
not brownness—
was good for US.

Still,
we are not qualified
to be US—
we need paperwork for that.

Like all the other words that went missing
since we immigrated here,
not knowing until now
what it means to move—
the same year
the twin towers went down,

the same year
they buried torture memos with dead bodies,
the same year
they justified their terrorism
by hiding behind stock market spikes
and so-called white lies.

We
are the collateral damage
they cannot name.
After ripping what is ours
out of ourselves,
they sold me salvation

at the expense of my history—
so we wouldn't look back—
couldn't look back—
to see that walls were built around US
from as early as 1521

and now—
they think we all look the same,
mistaken me for my neighbors—
who I love—
but are not

Me
because they erased the names
they wouldn't pronounce.