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MY PEOPLE
(After, and for, Alice Walker)

by

Niyi Osundare

- When I see my people
laden like desert camels,
trudging on, unsure of merciful wells
- When I see my people
sowing and not reaping, feeding and not fed
battling the thickening chains of a thousand seasons
- When I see my people
battered in Brixton, butchered in Birmingham,
flushed down the whitened drains of Jo'burg
- When I see my people
bought and sold sold and bought
used, then cast away like exhausted tickets
- When I see my people
starving like Sahara buffalos
their sweat fattening the pit of foreign stomachs
- When I see my people
looking without seeing, listening without hearing
grotesque, in masks off the altar of alien temples
- When I see my people
jumping running punching clowning
to please a jeering world
- When I see my people
shooting stabbing maiming
with tools fresh from the enemy's forge
- When I see my people
dwelling seas and dying of thirst
famine-frayed in gardens of ungarnered harvests
- When I see my people
Screaming praying screaming without AMEN
to gods with leaden ears
- When I see my people
acting unthinkingly obeying unaskingly
with the clumsy patience of wooden elephants

When I see my people
dreaming without sleeping, sleeping without dreaming
drifting, just drifting, like a seed in the storm

When I see my people
with a mouth without a tongue
weaverbirds with frozen beaks...

When I see my people
I know that drifting seed will settle
one day, on a bed of loam

But I know, too,
it will take an iron rock to deliver
the forbidding shell of its juicy kernel.