

## My People Are Rising

My people are rising; my people are rising,  
with olive branches and song, they are waking;  
the earth underneath their marching is shaking.  
My people are rising! They are no longer crouching;  
they are no longer stooping;  
and they are not hungry for bread alone.

...  
My people are rising; they are shaking off  
what has bound them, and their bonds scatter like moths.

...  
My Sanameyn, my Jeezah, my Inkhel are rising, bless them;

...  
My Banyas is rising and my Homs is rising; bless them.  
My Duma is marching in the streets and my Latakia is marching; bless them.  
My Qamishlo,

...  
My Idlib...my Hama is marching; bless them.

...  
I see them mustering unarmed, Kurd and Assyrian and Arab and Ghajar, bless them.  
Christian and Alawite and Druze, bless them, Sunni and Shia and Ismailia, bless them;  
tribe and tent and house and clan, bless them.

...  
My people are rising. A blessing on my people.  
They stand before tanks unarmed and they fall under bullets while calling,  
"The earth is big enough for all of us! Let us have a little of it too! The earth is big!"  
And as they bleed out on the cement in the street  
where they played as children, their blood mixes with rain and runs off  
into the big, big earth for which they longed.

And the young Horani said, as he lay dying that March day in Daraa City,  
in the pool of rain mixed with his blood,  
"It's worth it to have lived these last moments free."

...  
I hear his words, and his blood runs into the soil of my dark  
dark heart like the rain of this springtime in Syria.

by Mohja Kahf  
(used with permission)

duration: c. 7:15

### composer's note

I first heard this text in a 2016 BBC podcast; it is part of a longer work by Mohja Kahf entitled "My People Are Rising: An unfinished poem begun in Spring 2011 for an unfinished Revolution begun in March 2011." It spoke so viscerally of the tragic events in Syria that it was impossible for me to imagine setting it with Western harmonies. And so began an exploration of Arabic music, with its quarter-tone scales, its lack of vertical chordal structure, its abundantly ornamented heterophony. Since quarter-tones are not a part of our Western choral training, I opted to temper the scales a bit (resulting in a fair number of augmented seconds) and add a violin to the melodic mix for pitch support. The voices and violin are accompanied by a doumbek player, who is highly encouraged to improvise; the written notation is only there as a guide.