In the summer of 1916, Lavrosi Mamaladze—a soldier in the Russian army, born in what is now the Republic of Georgia and held in a prisoner-of-war camp in Austria-Hungary—found himself in a unique position. For over a year, anthropologists from Vienna had been visiting his camp, conducting research on the different ethnic and linguistic groups that made up the polyglot Russian Empire. They recorded prisoners' birthplaces and parentage, measured their skulls, and made plaster casts of their faces, the better to determine each man's "racial type." Many of them, Mamaladze included, were subjected to photographic documentation: full-length nudes and mugshot-style portraits. Despite these humiliating ordeals, Mamaladze had found a way to be useful. Gifted with languages, a sewing-machine salesman by profession, he acted as interpreter and factotum for the Austrians, filling their notebooks with Georgian linguistic material and identifying fellow prisoners for study. Now he had a chance to preserve, through the young technology of the phonograph, the beloved songs of his home region. But the musicologist hired to make the recordings was struggling with the songs' three overlapping voice-parts, unable to distinguish one singer from another. By chance, there happened to be three phonographs in the camp at the same time. Why not use all three devices simultaneously, each one recording a different singer? We do not know who came up with this idea—perhaps Mamaladze himself—but what resulted are some of the oldest multichannel recordings in world history, a precursor to everything from the Beatles to TikTok.

In "Dissected Listening: A Media History of Georgian Polyphony," the story of Lavrosi Mamaladze is the first turning point in a counter-history of sound and technology in the twentieth century. If mainstream narratives of sound-recording history tend to be progressive, advancing from one innovator to the next—Thomas Edison, Emile Berliner, Leopold Stokowski, Les Paul—I focus instead on contingent encounters and flows of knowledge across borders of language, empire, and intellectual domain. This extends recent scholarship emphasizing the entanglement of sound media with imperial and colonial practices of control and extraction. Throughout the history I tell in the dissertation, the unique sounds and structures of Georgian singing were repeatedly used to define and police boundaries of national, ethnic, and religious difference. But race, as seen in the story of the POW camp, is perhaps the fundamental axis of difference mediated by these sound recordings. The Georgian case thus enriches our understanding of the way voices are racialized in contemporary society, while simultaneously complicating the Black/white racial binary that animates much groundbreaking work in this area. In showing how polyphony came to define Georgian music, I argue for a decolonial sound studies, weaving together evidence drawn from archival historiography, ethnographic fieldwork, and the close listening and reading of media objects.

For many listeners today, the best-known fact about traditional music from of Georgia is that it is polyphonic—the term *polyphony* denoting the combination of multiple, independent melodic lines. Behind this simple description of musical texture, however, is a tangled history in which foundational ideas about polyphony developed in tandem with theories and practices of categorizing human difference, whether racial, national, or religious. Examining a series of experimental sound recordings made between 1916 and 1966, this dissertation reveals how

polyphony, long associated with ideologies of European cultural supremacy, came to define Georgian music on the world stage. In the process, it rewrites the early history of multichannel sound, illuminating moments of "dissected listening" in which audio techniques of separation and isolation allowed the foreign sounds of unfamiliar peoples to be brought within the bounds of a hegemonic vision of musical progress.

After surveying the landscape of racial ideology in the Caucasus and the consolidation of polyphony as a concept in nineteenth-century musicology, the dissertation proceeds chronologically, placing each recording experiment in historical and intellectual context. In Chapter One, I excavate the origins of multichannel sound technology in the First World War, when Georgian POWs serving in the Russian army were studied by Austrian anthropologists and musicologists, producing phonograph discs of Georgian songs alongside other forms of racialized documentation. Bringing out the hitherto untold stories of the Georgians who sang on these records, I show how the idea of capturing each singer's voice on a separate phonograph emerged in response to specific musical forms and through the exchange of media knowledge between prisoners and researchers. The next two chapters move to the 1930s to explore the work of Soviet folklorists who made similar recordings, revealing the role that Georgian polyphony played in two revolutionary intellectual movements of the time: Boris Asafiev's philosophy of musical aesthetics (Chapter Two) and Nikolai Marr's theory of linguistic evolution (Chapter Three). In Chapter Four, I listen for the traces of a lost set of tape recordings made in 1966 by the last living master of Georgian Orthodox sacred chant, a tradition nearly eradicated under Soviet rule and a potent symbol of Georgian religious identity. The conclusion follows the ramifications of this media history to the present day—from seismological measurements of vocal vibrations to pandemic-era Zoom concerts—proposing that the way we make music, whether together or in isolation, has been profoundly shaped by techniques of dissected listening. Throughout this work, Georgia and the Caucasus, long considered imperial borderlands or peripheries, prove to be a central, defining terrain for fundamental questions in twentieth-century life: how nations and national ideologies are constructed and naturalized; how social practices shape and are shaped by technologies of storage and transmission; and how some voices are erased and others allowed to contribute to the polyphonic texture of a harmonious society.