‘Enemies of their *patrie*’? Savoyard Identity and the Dilemmas of War, 1690–1713

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If Utrecht was a Peace with no obvious winners, one man stood apart as having achieved a spectacular success. By the time the negotiations were concluded, Victor Amadeus II, duke of Savoy (1675–1730) could pride himself on having wholly achieved his war aims: he had aggrandised both his territorial base and his dynasty, and had acquired the royal title of king of Sicily into the bargain. The House of Savoy’s rise through the ranks of European powers has been ably examined elsewhere.¹ By siding with the anti-French coalitions in the Nine Years’ War and the War of the Spanish Succession, the duke kept the pressure on France’s vulnerable south-eastern frontier, draining French resources away from other theatres. The concessions he managed to win in 1713 reflect the importance of this contribution to the allied war effort. But what is less clear is how Victor Amadeus’ audacious diplomatic gambles affected his relationship with his states, particularly Savoy, which lay to the west of the Alps. From the beginning of his personal rule in the 1680s, the duke had forged a new, more authoritarian, relationship with his Savoyard subjects. If the strains of this situation were already beginning to show in 1690, the ensuing years of French military occupation that ended in 1713 would only complicate matters further. An investigation of the attitudes of the people of Savoy, along with those of the rival Bourbon and Sabaudian authorities, therefore offers a unique perspective on the state of political allegiance at that time.

The duchy of Savoy formed the oldest part of the transalpine composite state belonging to the House of Savoy. Its dukes had, for most of the seventeenth century, enjoyed close relations with France, and the duchy’s economy,

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- 1 R. Oresko, ‘The House of Savoy in search for a royal crown in the seventeenth century’ in *Royal and republican sovereignty in early modern Europe: essays in memory of Ragnhild Hatton*, ed. R. Oresko *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); C. Storrs, *War, diplomacy and the rise of Savoy, 1690–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); G. Symcox, *Victor Amadeus II: absolutism in the Savoyard state, 1675–1730* (London: University of California Press, 1983).

nobility and church were closely linked with the neighbouring French provinces. But all this was to change as, from the 1680s, the young Victor Amadeus II became increasingly frustrated by Louis XIV's vice-like grip over his states and sought an opportunity to free himself. The Franco-Sabaudian alliance came to an abrupt end in 1690, leading to a French invasion of Victor Amadeus' states and the loss of Savoy, which remained under occupation until peace was concluded in 1696. The French occupied the duchy a second time from 1703–1713, after Victor Amadeus again broke his alliance with Louis XIV and joined the allied powers during the War of the Spanish Succession.

Very little has been written about the reactions of occupied populations to foreign rule during the early modern period. By contrast, for the Revolutionary era there have been several important studies, such as T.W. Blanning's work on the French occupations of the Rhineland.² Other studies of more recent occupations have focused on the face-to-face interaction between occupier and occupied, at the levels of both lived experience and symbolic representation.³ These works have highlighted the importance of attempting to reconstruct attitudes in order to understand the way occupations progressed. Yet historians of the *ancien régime* have largely failed to adapt to these methodological developments.⁴ This is due in part to a paucity of source material relating to the largely illiterate non-elite sections of society at this time; and where sources do exist, they are often totally impressionistic. It is therefore difficult to be exact about the distribution of popular allegiances. But equally, there has also been a widely held perception among historians of the limited role of ordinary people in determining policy. More recent scholarship has demonstrated that in fact popular views *were* important in times of war when the ability to mobilise resources and win public support was of great consequence.⁵ Low-level violence and confrontation can therefore reveal much about policy formulation on the part of both the French occupiers and also of the usurped duke.

2 See T.C.W. Blanning, *Reform and revolution in Mainz, 1743–1803* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); K.H. Wegert, *German radicals confront the common people: revolutionary politics and popular politics, 1789–1849* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1992).

3 J. Hantraye, *Les Cosaques aux Champs-Élysées: L'Occupation de la France après la Chute de Napoléon* (Paris: Belin, 2005).

4 For a more detailed discussion of the historiography of early modern military occupations see P. McCluskey, *Absolute Monarchy on the Frontiers: Louis XIV's Military Occupations of Lorraine and Savoy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 1–7.

5 J. Black, *European International Relations, 1648–1815* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

This chapter investigates what Savoy's experience can reveal about identity and dynastic loyalty in the years leading up to the Peace of Utrecht. It was traditionally assumed that for non-elite groups in *ancien régime* Europe, allegiance to any particular ruler remained largely superficial until the advent of nationalism in the late eighteenth century. More recent work has highlighted the continued importance of personal and dynastic connections in defining identities, particularly in societies like Savoy's that were still permeated by feudalism. Furthermore, changes in the legal status of military occupation meant that the legitimacy of both the conqueror and the usurped ruler were far from clear. The aim of this chapter is therefore to provide an examination of the reactions of non-elite Savoyards to French conquest and an account of the subsequent level of co-operation between the occupied populations and the French regime. Once this has been established, it will suggest which factors motivated people in this period to choose one ruler over another. In doing so it will reflect on what defined the identity of Savoyards, given the duchy's position as a 'frontier' territory between the French and Italian cultural spheres. This study will cast new light on the values and priorities of non-elite groups in European society at the turn of the eighteenth century.

Savoyard Reactions to Conquest

The French conquests of Savoy in 1690 and 1703 were achieved with remarkable facility: on both occasions the towns capitulated quickly, and the duchy (with the exception of the fortress of Montmélian) was occupied in matter of weeks. Even by the standards of that time, when populations tended to be fairly passive in the immediate aftermath of conquest, such rapid turnover was unusual.⁶ The French certainly perceived this lack of resistance as a sign of the Savoyards' willingness to embrace Louis XIV as their new ruler. In 1690, when the three estates of Savoy swore allegiance to Louis—as they were required to do by the French army—they asked that the king, 'not treat them as newly conquered enemies, but as good subjects'.⁷ The same happened the second time around in 1703: the intendant of the neighbouring Franche-Comté wrote that the Savoyards would not resist the French, 'as they desire so strongly to give

6 The Savoyards had also been docile during the previous French conquest in 1630: J. Humbert, *Une grande entreprise oubliée: Les Français en Savoie sous Louis XIII* (Paris: Hachette, 1960), 245–247.

7 Vincennes, S[ervice] H[istorique de la] D[éfense, Fonds de l'Armée de] T[erre], A¹ 1010, 43, Bonnat to Louvois, 20 August 1690.

themselves to the king'.⁸ Following the fall of Chambéry, the French military commander the maréchal de Tessé wrote that the townspeople seemed 'quite happy' with the arrival of the French army, and as he put it to the king, 'nothing is easier, sire, than to enter a town when they open up the gates for us'.⁹

While it is necessary to exercise some scepticism towards these French reports, there does appear to have been a level of popular support for the French presence. Even the Savoyard sources talk of a groundswell of popular joy at the French army's arrival: the bishop of Geneva/Annecy was informed by one of his relatives in Chambéry that, 'people here sing nothing but *Vive France!*'.¹⁰ In 1703, the disposition of the common people was similar: as the French commander in Grenoble wrote, there was little to fear from Savoyard incursions into the Dauphiné, because 'all Savoyards [...] wish to be subjects of His Majesty'.¹¹ A French priest resident in Savoy went further, 'the people and nobility of Savoy have such little affection for His Highness [the duke of Savoy] ... and the conquest will be even easier than during the last war'.¹² Moreover, several Savoyards were sending their effects into France for safe-keeping, 'proclaiming loudly that they wish to belong to the king of France and from the moment the troops arrive, they will give themselves to him with pleasure'.¹³

This initial level of support is even clearer if we compare the attitude of the people of Savoy with those of other territories conquered by the French during this period such as Lorraine, Roussillon or the Franche-Comté. In several of these, resistance manifested itself in the provision of intelligence to France's enemies, joining the enemy army, or emigration.¹⁴ More passive resistance could entail the non-payment of taxes, smuggling, or discrimination against French people who lived locally.¹⁵ In parts of the Franche-Comté, following the French conquest of 1674, many local residents initially refused

8 SHDT A¹ 1701, 70, Ferrand to Chamillart, 10 November 1703.

9 SHDT A¹ 1690, 177, Tessé to Louis XIV, 16 November 1703.

10 Chambéry, A[rchives] D[épartementales de] S[avoie] 2B 81, Jean d'Arenthon d'Alex to Denis d'Alex, 15 August 1690.

11 SHDT A¹ 1702, 166, Berulle to Chamillart, 7 October 1703.

12 SHDT A¹ 1702, 192, Bronod to Chamillart, 20 October 1703.

13 SHDT A¹ 1702, 175, Berulle to Chamillart, 12 October 1703.

14 On Roussillon, for example, see D. Stewart, *Assimilation and acculturation in seventeenth-century Europe: Roussillon and France, 1659–1715* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), 113.

15 Stewart, *Assimilation and acculturation*, 122; B. Grosperin, *L'Influence française et le sentiment national français en Franche-Comté de la conquête à la Révolution (1674–1789)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1967), 43–44.

to speak to French soldiers or administrators, and innkeepers took down their signs so they would not have to serve French people.¹⁶ Similarly, the population of Lorraine registered its distaste for the French presence there following the conquest of 1670 in a variety of ways.¹⁷ Much of this hostility was due to lingering memories of the horrors of previous French occupations: during the Thirty Years' War, Lorraine and the Franche-Comté both suffered economic and demographic catastrophes.¹⁸

Why should it be that Savoy was more inclined to welcome the French? In a long-term sense, perceptions were conditioned by the pre-existing economic and cultural links between the people of Savoy and their French neighbours, particularly in the Dauphiné. Seasonal migration between Savoy and the neighbouring French provinces had long been encouraged, although definitive emigration was viewed by the duke as a withdrawal of obedience and could be severely punished with confiscation of property or death. In spite of this, many families left in the first half of the seventeenth century due to poverty, crossing into the Franche-Comté or the Dauphiné, strengthening the kinship networks diffused over the political frontier.¹⁹ Most Savoyards therefore had no reason to consider the French as 'the Other'. Nor had they had much contact with the French army, and even the long French occupation of the sixteenth century (Savoy was occupied from 1530 to 1561) does not appear to have weighed very heavily on the duchy: demographic records show population growth during the period up to 1561 of as much as fifty per cent.²⁰

Their pro-French inclinations can also be explained by the strained relationship that existed between the people of Savoy and their duke, Victor Amadeus. Jean-Marie Moeglin has argued that, well into the early modern period, princely dynasties formed the central reference point for the affirmation of regional or 'national' identity.²¹ The dynasty was linked to a country and its people through a commonly held belief in Providence or divine grace (the ruler being chosen by God); it also personified the ancient notion of a body of rights and privileges which engendered feelings of belonging to a community.²²

16 French responses were often severe and created further bitterness: in Arbois, the French ordered the demolition of the town's fortifications as punishment. *Ibid.*, 43.

17 McCluskey, *Absolute Monarchy*, 105–106, 199–200.

18 McCluskey, *Absolute Monarchy*, 19; Groperrin, *L'Influence française*, 12–13.

19 McCluskey, *Absolute Monarchy*, 259.

20 R. Devos, 'Un siècle en mutation' in *Histoire de la Savoie*, ed. P. Guichonnet (Toulouse: Privat, 1973) 232–233.

21 J.-M. Moeglin, 'Nations et nationalisme du Moyen Age à l'Epoque Moderne,' *Revue Historique* 123 (1999): 537–553.

22 Moeglin, 'Nations et nationalisme,' 543.

In Savoy, however, the dynastic link had become weakened. The late seventeenth century saw a growing sense of alienation between Savoyards and an increasingly distant Piedmontese court based over the Alps in Turin. From the 1680s, Victor Amadeus had struck at Savoy's rights and privileges, beginning a confrontation that would continue throughout his reign. Though inspired by a drive towards fiscal efficiency, the duke and his agents were met with increasing resentment and obstructionism on the part of Savoy's institutions. That many of the duke's agents were Piedmontese only compounded the problem: many Savoyards detested the Piedmontese²³ and had little sense of common identity with them despite their shared sovereign.

To the French authorities in the region, this sense of alienation was clearly evident. The intendant of the Dauphiné, Etienne-Jean Bouchu reported in 1703 that on a recent trip through Savoy he had noticed a great discontentment at the harshness of the Sabaudian authorities and above all at the multiplicity and excess of taxes.²⁴ In addition, Cardinal Le Camus (the bishop of Grenoble, whose diocese covered part of Savoy) wrote that the duke's governor of Chambéry, the marquis de Salles, was despised by the people because of his heavy-handed manner: shortly after the outbreak of war he had demanded three thousand bags of grain from the *conseil de ville*, whereupon a syndic informed him that they did not have the money or credit to provide such a quantity, and that it would be a great source of pleasure for them if he could find it the governor then threatened to throw the syndic out of the window!²⁵

Despite de Salles's apparent harshness, the Sabaudian authorities also offered strong incentives to join the duke's service: in October 1703, Victor Amadeus offered exemption from the *taille* and *capitation* for the duration of the war and three years after to all men who enrolled in his service.²⁶ Given these incentives, it is telling that only thirty or so bourgeois volunteered to join de Salles at this time.²⁷ And the passivity of the population meant that they posed no threat to the relatively small French force which took Chambéry: as Tessé noted, de Salles had posted *ordonnances* exhorting people to 'smash everything to smithereens,' something they could do quite easily given that in

23 See McCluskey, *Absolute monarchy*, 134.

24 SHDT A¹ 1690, 50, Bouchu to Chamillart, 4 November 1703. Bouchu had left the army of Italy at the end of August and passed through Savoy on his return route to Grenoble.

25 SHDT A¹ 1690, 168, [unknown] to Le Camus, 29 October 1703.

26 Paris, A[rchives] des A[ffaires] E[trangères], C[orrespondance] P[olitique], Sard[aigne] 112, fol. 358, 'Edict de S.A.R.,' 4 October 1703.

27 SHDT A¹ 1690, 168, [unknown] to Le Camus, 29 October 1703.

Chambéry there were eighteen thousand people who could 'take by the throat' the small number of French troops stationed there.²⁸

A further explanation for the distinct lack of hostility toward the French is that, on a day-to-day level, the French occupations of Savoy did not entail very much visible change. People were eager to see continuity, above all in terms of commerce and their livelihoods. When the French arrived in Chambéry in August 1690 the musket-makers of the town told the French commander they would be happy to work for the French if they were paid the same rate of fifteen florins per month as the duke had paid them.²⁹ There was also an essential continuity with the previous regime as the duchy's judicial and financial apparatus remained in place, and on an administrative level an intendant appointed by Turin was simply replaced by an official (known as a *commissaire ordonnateur*) appointed by Versailles. The remit of early modern provincial administration was still sufficiently superficial that a change of sovereign did not significantly affect the way the duchy was administered.

It is significant, however, that there was a markedly different tone to the welcome accorded to the French the second time around. The aftermath of the conquest of 1703 was characterised by a muted caution: after their arrival in Chambéry in 1703, the French intendant observed that the population was more reserved than previously.³⁰ This caution was largely due to fear of retribution from Victor Amadeus. Following the return of Savoy in 1696, the duke had appointed one of his closest aides, Giovanni Battista Gropello, as *intendant-général* of Savoy. Gropello's task was to reassert the duke's authority over the duchy, after it had co-operated with the French with a conspicuous lack of resistance. With this in mind, a special tribunal was established in 1696, headed by Gropello, to judge those Savoyards who had collaborated with the French. The tribunal sat for three years and had an ugly character as it depended on denunciations; the church hierarchy was instrumental in this process, getting the faithful to come forward with information under pain of ecclesiastical censure.

The importance of the role of Victor Amadeus in shaping the attitudes of the population is further highlighted by a brief comparison with the experience of the county Nice, another of the duke's territories occupied by France twice during this period. Shortly before the second conquest, the Prince of Monaco wrote that he believed that the people of Nice would prefer to be

28 SHDT A¹ 1690, 199, Tessé to Louis XIV, 1 December 1703.

29 SHDT A¹ 1010 nos. 50 & 61, Saint-Ruth to Louvois, 22 & 30 Aug. 1690. St Ruth offered them the same and ordered three hundred muskets per month.

30 SHDT A¹ 1690, 71, Bouchu to Chamillart, 16 November 1703.

subjects of Louis XIV, the duke having always treated them harshly.³¹ Similarly, in 1706, the French *commissaire* Paratte wrote to Chamillart, 'It seems the people will voluntarily submit to obedience, and I recognise that the most part wish with all their heart to stay there forever'.³² As in Savoy, however, there was, a strong feeling of caution amongst the population of Nice after the second conquest: the French commander noted in 1705 that the people of Nice wished to be forced to return to their homes, 'in order to appear more attached to their natural prince'.³³

Savoyard Society and the Experience of Occupation

The contrast between Savoyard reactions to the first and second French conquests reveals how attitudes were far from fixed. They evolved, reflecting the changing dynamics of the occupations and the larger conflicts they were a part of. On a basic level, people's attitudes towards the occupying regime were coloured by the deepening financial hardships that accompanied war. The consequences of conquest weighed much more heavily on the humble, and any favourable aspects of regime change did not concern them. The majority of Savoyards survived on a subsistence basis, and any initial enthusiasm for the French presence waned as the realities of war sank in. For them, survival took precedence over the choice between two remote dynasties. This reaction also reflects the priorities of French occupation policy during this period: the hallmark of the French approach was to mollify the elites as far as possible, while placing the burdens on the common people.

What resistance emerged was therefore partly based on the unwillingness—or more likely inability—of communities to carry the disproportionately heavy burdens placed upon them. The level of the *taille* and other contributions on the towns almost doubled for peasants during this period, in addition to which many had to provide the *ustensile* (heating, bedding, salt and cooking materials) for quartered troops or work in the *corvées* for transport or fortification work.³⁴ If the comings and goings of soldiers through Savoy caused problems for the inhabitants, the lodging of soldiers was no less problematic.³⁵

31 SHDT A¹ 1767, 294, prince de Monaco to Chamillart, 30 March 1704.

32 SHDT A¹ 1973, 113, Paratte to Chamillart, 16 February 1706.

33 SHDT A¹ 1874, 101, Usson to Chamillart, 27 May 1705.

34 McCluskey, *Absolute monarchy*, 94–100.

35 Complaints of the townspeople of Chambéry at the disorders and inconvenience caused by the billeting can be found in the Archives Municipales de Chambéry: see e.g. BB 124, fol. 70, 10 December 1703.

One resident of Annecy recorded in his diary in May 1691 that French troops had 'taken everything' and had 'ruined the country'.³⁶ Profiting from fear, officers extorted 'gratifications' to contain their soldiers, but disorders continued. Requisitions by the French were incessant, compounding bad harvests and leading to famine.³⁷ As the French intendant wrote in autumn 1693, the Savoyards were accustomed to a harsh life, but since 1690, the majority of them in the mountainous provinces of the Tarentaise and the Maurienne had to live off ground shells and nuts into which the better-off people mixed a small amount of oats or barley.³⁸

People could also make their choices based on personal or recounted experience of the occupying regime, in particular on the role of the French soldiers or officials they had to engage with. The correspondence of the war minister contains many instances of low-level violence between French soldiers and local inhabitants.³⁹ To take one notorious example: on 24 August 1705, a lawyer named Vibert, together with his wife and four small children were staying in their country house outside of Chambéry. At around seven in the evening a dozen French soldiers attacked the unsuspecting family, breaking down the door with their muskets, shouting, 'tue, tue, point de quartier!'; Vibert begged them for mercy on behalf of his pregnant wife and children, whereupon the soldiers seized him by the neck and stabbed him to death. They then ransacked the house and set fire to it. The enormity of this crime frightened the entire duchy, prompting a direct intervention from the French war minister that the criminals be brought to 'prompt and vigorous justice'.⁴⁰

Such encounters undoubtedly tarnished the reputation of the French military amongst the Savoyard people. Yet in many cases, the French soldiers were not committing wanton violence but acting on behalf of local inhabitants who had an axe to grind with their neighbours. Much as in modern occupations, the presence of occupying forces led to the rivalries and factions within

36 J. Nicolas, *La Savoie au 18^e siècle: Noblesse et bourgeoisie* (2 vols., Paris: La Fontaine de Siloé, 1978), 1, 555.

37 Nicolas, *La Savoie au 18^e siècle*, 1, 155.

38 A.M. Boislisle, *Correspondance des contrôleurs généraux des finances avec les intendants des provinces, 1683–1715* (3 vols., Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1874–1897), 1, 338, 1235, Bouchu to Barbezieux, 26 September 1693.

39 In December 1706, for example, a French lieutenant named publicly beat the lawyer Charles Perrin and another inhabitant of Chambéry who came to his aid. SHDT A¹ 1968, 518, Chamillart to Vallière, 19 December 1706; 558, Declaration by Perrin and Nicod, 26 December 1706. In November 1707 a group of French soldiers murdered an inhabitant of Puisset in the Maurienne named Lavanas: SHDT A¹ 2102, 6, Angervilliers to Chamillart, 6 January 1708.

40 SHDT A¹ 1862, 249, The Widow Vibert to Chamillart, 2 September 1705.

society becoming exacerbated, often resulting in violence and murder. A little less than a year after the murder of Vibert, another French soldier was condemned to five years on the galleys for assassinating one of the most famous lawyers in Chambéry in his home as he slept. During the trial it emerged that the soldier had been paid to carry out the murder by a Savoyard theology student, who evidently had a vendetta against the lawyer. Such actions were not uncommon: the head of the Savoyard judiciary wrote to the French war minister that, 'things have gotten to such a point that every day the inhabitants of this town menace each other over the smallest quarrels, threatening to avenge themselves with the help of the [French] soldiers that they have at their beck and call.'⁴¹

A bizarre series of events in 1706 demonstrates further how local officials and military officers could set the tone of the occupation, and also how the fabric of society could be strained by foreign occupation as well as the fear of reprisals once it was over. That summer, the military governor in Savoy, the marquis de Vallière, was obliged to arrest the comte de Limandre, an Auvergnat captain in the king's dragoons. Limandre was a charismatic fantasist who had managed to persuade many Savoyards that he was the son of Louis XIV. As such, he made people speak to him on bended knee; people presented petitions to him on a daily basis, handing over their money on the promise that he would direct their concerns to the king in person. Learning this, Chamillart ordered Limandre to be imprisoned for the duration of the war, and stipulated that he was to be denied verbal and written communication, as he was considered 'the greatest writer in the world.'⁴²

Shortly afterwards, as if to prove this accolade was well deserved, a remonstrance found its way to Versailles, addressed from 'The People of Savoy to His Most Christian Majesty.'⁴³ Claiming to be writing in the name of the 'nobility, bourgeois and Third Estate of Savoy', the author (probably Limandre) recounted the deplorable state to which the people of Savoy had been reduced by excessive impositions. But the real point was a character assassination of Vallière: all Savoy wished to be delivered from 'his rages, his threats, his bizarre temperament, his severity and his excessive rigour which he exercises indifferently to everyone.'⁴⁴

Limandre's rivalry with Vallière evidently took on a wider significance, reflecting divisions in Savoyard society, which were exacerbated by the occupation. A Chambérienne by the name of d'Avril Pellissier claimed that,

41 SHDT A¹ 1968, 339, Tencin to Chamillart, 6 August 1706.

42 SHDT A¹ 1968, 349, Chamillart to Vallière, 9 August 1706.

43 SHDT A¹ 1968, 390^{bis}, 'Lettre sans nom,' August 1706.

44 SHDT A¹ 1968, 390^{bis}, 'Lettre sans nom,' August 1706.

because she regularly passed on whatever seditious information she heard to Vallière, her enemies in Chambéry used Limandre to torment her, 'sparing neither my honour nor my reputation'. Pellissier herself had incurred the wrath of Limandre because she had prevented him from seducing a girl and then denounced him to the girl's family. He subsequently paid a visit to Pellissier to insult her and inform her that she was widely hated in Chambéry for passing on information to the French governor. He added that she deserved to be stoned, and that when the duke of Savoy returned she would get her just deserts.⁴⁵

This case not only reflects the strains brought about by foreign occupation but also an awareness that the occupation was temporary. It was clear, particularly during the second occupation, that Louis XIV had little intention of retaining Savoy in the long term. The legitimacy of the French presence in Savoy was based solely on the right of conquest; the French government never invoked history or dynastic right to legitimise their presence in Savoy as they did in provinces they wished to annex permanently.⁴⁶ This distinction was clear in the official language used: after the conquest of Savoy in 1703, the people were informed that, 'His Majesty wishes to treat his new Savoyard subjects just as well as his natural subjects.'⁴⁷ It was also reflected in the administrative structures put in place: there was no intendant for Savoy, only a *subdélégué* of the intendant of the Dauphiné. Savoy served for Louis XIV, as it had for his father and Cardinal Richelieu, as a defensive buffer, a zone to quarter the army, and a bargaining chip in peace negotiations.⁴⁸

The Role of Victor Amadeus

Attitudes were perhaps affected most of all by the actions of the rightful ruler of the occupied territory and his agents. Victor Amadeus proved particularly adept at stirring up fear among the Savoyard people to dissuade them from collaborating with the French. The duke's tactics were varied and inventive. In 1691 his government in Turin began sending letters to the saltpetre contractors of Savoy, menacing them for having worked for the French authorities. In order

45 SHDT A¹ 1968, 401, d'Avril Pellissier to Chamillart, 30 August 1706. Limandre reported later that year that Pellissier had been forced to leave Chambéry for being too close to Vallière. SHDT A¹ 1968, 584, Limandre to Chamillart, December 1706.

46 P. McCluskey, 'From Regime Change to *Réunion*: Louis XIV's Quest for Legitimacy in Lorraine, 1670–97,' *English Historical Review* 126 (2011): 1386–1407.

47 ADS A 24, 'Ordre,' Bouchu, 8 December 1703.

48 McCluskey, *Absolute monarchy*, 55–56. On the 1630s see Humbert, *Les Français en Savoie*, 221–222.

to protect them, the French *commissaire ordonnateur* imprisoned them, with their foreknowledge, for the sake of appearances.⁴⁹ In 1705 the duke attempted unsuccessfully to incite an uprising in his favour in Savoy based on the notion that the Savoyards 'desire nothing more than to escape from the oppression in which they have found themselves since the invasion of the country'.⁵⁰ To follow up on this, he sent his sergeants disguised as peasants into Savoyard communities to surreptitiously raise troops by repeating the amnesty for deserters and promising payment due to all those who had been taken prisoner and subsequently escaped.⁵¹ The French later learnt that this tactic was extremely successful, and that many recruits had joined Victor Amadeus in Piedmont.⁵²

In response, the occupying regime was limited in what they could do. Theirs was essentially a defensive, reactive approach. Some felt that the continuation of commerce with Piedmont would only strengthen the attachment between the Savoyard people and their duke,⁵³ reflecting the link between economic activity and allegiance. In 1692 and again in 1707 they tried closing the border with Piedmont, but on both occasions they ultimately realised that this was futile given the geography of the region. The French also had to balance the need to support commerce (which ultimately paid for the army, through taxes) with the restrictions on the flow of goods and people. They were also eager to encourage soldiers from the army of Victor Amadeus to return to Savoy so that they could be enlisted into French service. But the duke took measures to prevent this, spreading word through his emissaries that the French would arrest and execute any man who crossed the Alps from Italy into Savoy or Geneva.⁵⁴

During the second occupation Victor Amadeus' tactic of issuing threats coupled with incentives became louder and more frequent. In 1706, as the tide of the war turned decisively against France, he issued a declaration offering amnesty for all deserters joining his service, and renewed the promise of privileges and exemptions. But those subjects who took the side of France or 'favoured' France in its levies would be 'regarded and treated as enemies of

49 SHDT A¹ 1239, 91, Bonval to Barbezieux, 21 August 1691.

50 AAE CP Sard. 115, 123, 'Copy of the commission of M. the duke of Savoy to incite an uprising in his favour in Savoy,' 8 December 1705.

51 SHDT A¹ 1994, fol. 438, Leguerchois to Chamillart, 22 January 1707.

52 SHDT A¹ 2099, 50, Leguerchois to Chamillart, 13 May 1708; A¹ 2170, 232, Voysin to Medavy, 6 April 1709. Many of these passed into Piedmont under the pretext of commerce. SHDT A¹ 2175, 106, Ponnat to Voysin, 25 March 1709.

53 SHDT A¹ 1079, 187, Bouchu to Barbezieux, 2 March 1692.

54 SHDT A¹ 1972, 284, Chamillart to Angervilliers, 12 October 1706; A¹ 2038, 125, Chamillart to Leguerchois, 12 February 1707; 147, Leguerchois to Chamillart, 22 February 1707.

their *patrie*, traitors, and rebels against their legitimate sovereign.⁵⁵ Victor Amadeus' propaganda was therefore not wholly negative and threatening in tone: in one notice distributed by his agents in the towns and villages across Savoy, addressed '*A la belle jeunesse Savoyarde*', the duke repeated this combination of promises and threats to the people of Savoy with the same emotive language: they were to make the journey to the frontier to join their 'great and Legitimate Sovereign,' 'a journey so advantageous to your own interests as well as those of the whole *Nation Savoyarde*.'⁵⁶

Such language would certainly have appealed to the Savoyards' sense of identity, and it is this very slippery concept of identity which is crucial in explaining the behaviour of an occupied people in any era.⁵⁷ *Nation* at this time referred to a closed community, one defined by common origins. In 1694, the first dictionary of the *Académie Française* defined *nation* as 'the inhabitants of a common country, who live under the same laws and use the same language'.⁵⁸ *Patrie* also denoted a closed community: citizens belonged to a *patrie*—that is, the land of their fathers—by birth and owed allegiance to it. In most contemporary understandings of the term, however, this would have excluded 'Others' who happened to share the same sovereign, such as the Piedmontese. Victor Amadeus' appeal to a broader 'pan-Sabaudian' interpretation of *nation* or *patrie* was therefore an astute move by a ruler living in an age before the emergence of a modern sense of nationalism defined by language and a distinct 'national' culture.

What Victor Amadeus was doing was in some ways novel, but it also mirrored broader trends. Historians of France have argued that the decades around 1700 were crucial for the development of the concepts of *nation* and *patrie* and that these terms were taking on new meanings.⁵⁹ Both referred to France, but *nation* also signified group of people sharing certain binding qualities. *Patrie*, on the other hand, was increasingly used in the sense of a territory commanding a person's emotional attachment and ultimate political loyalty.⁶⁰ As is well known, the political and cultural significance of these concepts increased over

55 SHDT A¹ 1968, 168, Vallière to Chamillart, 16 April 1706; 169, 'Déclaration par S.A.R.' [undated].

56 SHDT A¹ 1968, 509, Vallière to Chamillart, 17 December 1706; A¹ 2175, 21, '*A la belle jeunesse Savoyarde*,' 1 March 1709.

57 See F. Bédarida, 'Vichy et la crise de la conscience française' in *Le régime de Vichy et les Français*, ed. J.-P. Azéma & F. Bédarida (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 79.

58 D.A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, MA, 2001), 5–6.

59 Bell, *The Cult of the Nation*, 7.

60 Bell, *The Cult of the Nation*, 7.

eighteenth century.⁶¹ The first decade of the eighteenth century was, however, an important stage in the development of these ideas. That this was a period dominated by war is no coincidence; by the end of the decade, even the Sun King felt it expedient to address the people of France directly, appealing for a renewed devotion to the nation, and zeal for the *patrie*. Louis XIV's famous plea for public support in June 1709 came after the collapse of The Hague negotiations; in it, the king invoked the rhetoric of the ancient symbolism of the monarchy, which still lay at the heart of French identity.⁶²

In seeking to explain Victor Amadeus' own appeal to 'national' sentiment, however, it is important to bear in mind Savoy's status as part of an ethnically and culturally diverse composite state. As John H. Elliott memorably put it, most states in the early modern period were composite, though some 'were clearly more composite than others'.⁶³ The Sabaudian state had little sense of shared identity, a condition that had been exacerbated by the duke's policy of marginalising Savoy at the expense of his Italian territories. Clearly this lack of shared identity posed significant difficulties for the rulers of a composite state in wartime, and the duke was attempting to find ways to compensate for this problem. Recently historians have highlighted the capacity of early modern governments to successfully forge and sustain composite political identities out of disparate ethnic groups, for example in Poland-Lithuania and the British Isles. Historians including Jeremy Black and Christopher Storrs have also argued that in this period 'national' sentiment could be invoked to define a common threat.⁶⁴ But this tactic usually involved a more conscious use of the 'Other'; here, because of the strength of the pre-existing Savoyard attachment to France, Victor Amadeus instead appealed to this more positive concept of *la Nation*, or *le patrie*. And his interventions certainly seem to have been very effective, judging by French reports.⁶⁵

The duke appears, therefore, to have made a conscious effort to build a sovereign political community grouping his different subject people together.

61 See e.g. P.R. Campbell, 'The Language of Patriotism in France, 1750–1770,' *e-France*, 1 (2007): 1–43.

62 J. Klaitis, *Printed Propaganda Under Louis XIV: Absolute Monarchy and Public Opinion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 210–20.

63 J.H. Elliott, 'A Europe of Composite Monarchies,' *Past and Present* 137 (1992): 51.

64 Black, *European International Relations*, 22; Storrs, *War, Diplomacy*, 220. On national sentiment in pre-modern times, see the introduction to Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer's *Power and the Nation in European History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), especially 3–13.

65 SHDT A¹ 1968, 509, Vallière to Chamillart, 17 December 1706; A¹ 2038, 59, Vallière to Chamillart, 28 January 1707.

This phenomenon—which might be termed ‘proto-nationalism’—emerged out of the experience of foreign occupation, and out of Savoy’s particular status within a composite monarchy. By the turn of the eighteenth century, the traditional sense of loyalty to the ruling dynasty of Savoy was in crisis, as both the Savoyards and their duke demonstrated their willingness to abandon each other. For their part, the people of Savoy existed in a cultural and economic continuum that extended beyond Savoy and into the neighbouring French provinces; any form of dynastic attachment was undercut by familial or material self-interest. Moreover, their festering sentiments of alienation may have been compounded by Victor Amadeus’ manoeuvring in the diplomatic sphere. The theme of territorial exchange was a recurrent feature in international relations at this time: in the partition treaties drawn up prior to the death of Carlos II of Spain in 1700, and also in the negotiations at The Hague and Utrecht, Victor Amadeus expressed his willingness to exchange Savoy for Milan or even for Spain and its empire. News that the duke was prepared to give up his ancient and sacred bonds with the territory for a more prestigious throne cannot have endeared him in any way to the people of Savoy.

Servants of Two Masters?

The behaviour of Savoyard population suggests that they experienced an acute conflict of loyalties at the turn of the eighteenth century. While initially welcoming the French conquerors, the Savoyards became more cautious as the occupations progressed: this shift was largely a result of the actions of the ducal government and to a lesser extent the steadily worsening material burdens placed upon them by the French. By any measure, the non-elite sections of Savoyard society were given very little incentive to collaborate with the French occupiers: it was they who overwhelmingly bore the brunt of the occupations in terms of providing revenues and war materiel. Yet they passively accepted these burdens and were unwilling to rise in revolt against the French when prompted to do so by Victor Amadeus. That the Savoyards refused to view the French conquerors as the enemy or the ‘Other’ is a reflection of the divided and porous nature of loyalty in this frontier region.

Throughout the Nine Years’ War and War of the Spanish Succession, the people of Savoy remained ambivalent in their feelings towards both Victor Amadeus and Louis XIV. In this regard their responses mirrored those of the Savoyard elites: the nobility, the clergy and the administrative elites generally demonstrated much less overt hostility to the French than their counterparts did in Lorraine, the Franche-Comté, or the other territories conquered by

Louis XIV.⁶⁶ Many initially threw in their lot with the French but would later be persuaded to rejoin the service of Victor Amadeus through a mixture of threats and appeals to their sense of identity. Yet for all his skilful manipulation of Savoyard 'national' feeling during these occupations, Victor Amadeus II was far from committed to retaining Savoy: though this was the birthplace of his dynasty, he repeatedly indicated that he was prepared to exchange the duchy for more lucrative or prestigious territories elsewhere.⁶⁷ In the European dynastic system of the early eighteenth century, ambitious rulers like Victor Amadeus increasingly saw their territories as expendable in the pursuit of dynastic advancement. The ancient reciprocal bonds of loyalty he had with his Savoyard subjects withered as a result. Regional and 'national' identities in these small states were still shaped in reference to princely dynasties, therefore, but in a much less positive way than before.

What effect the duke's policies had on changing attitudes and loyalties in the longer term is beyond the remit of this chapter. What is clear, in the short term, is that they were effective at generating fear. As historians of more recent occupations have noted, the emotional reactions of the occupied populations take on an enormous importance: among these, fear was usually the main motive for collaborating with an occupier.⁶⁸ The greater source of fear in this case, however, seems not to have come from the occupying French armies but rather from the thought of the eventual return of the duke's administrators. This suggests that for a conquered people in *ancien régime* Europe, the nature of the relationship they had with their legitimate, but usurped, ruler was still the most significant factor in determining their responses to foreign occupation. This was even true, as in this case, where there was a common language and culture between themselves and the conquerors. All of which serves to illustrate the way in which the study of previously overlooked or neglected second- or third-ranking European states can open up important new perspectives on early modern history. As a frontier zone and area of cultural and economic exchange, and as one part of a composite state, Savoy tells us much about how loyalties changed and how identities were redefined in the period leading up to the Peace of Utrecht.

66 McCluskey, *Absolute monarchy*, chapters 5–7.

67 On Victor Amadeus' attempts to exchange Savoy for Milan see Symcox, *Victor Amadeus*, 137–8, 162.

68 P. Burrin, 'Writing the History of Military Occupations' in *France at war: Vichy and the historians*, ed. S. Fishman et al. (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 84.