

A PROTAGONIST BETWEEN FICTION AND REALITY: FELÂTUN BEY

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ÖZET

Ahmet Midhat Efendi'nin yaşadığı ve eserlerini yazdığı dönemini yansıtmaları bakımından en fazla akis uyandıran ve sonraki dönemlerde de adından sıklıkla söz ettiren en önemli eseri Felâton Bey ve Rakım Efendi romanıdır. Bu makalede tarihî olay ve kişilerden hareketle romanda yanlış batılılaşmanın temsilcisi olarak sunulan Felâton Bey ile Osmanlı Devleti'nin yaşadığı modernleşme deneyimi arasındaki paralellikler ortaya konulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ahmet Midhat Efendi, Felâton Bey, modernleşme, alafrangalık, Osmanlı Devleti

ABSTRACT

In terms of reflecting the period when Ahmet Midhat Efendi lived and penned his works, the novel Felâton Beyle Rakım Efendi is the most important work of him, the one that set off the highest reaction and was mentioned most often later on. Through two characters opposite to each other in his novel, Ahmet Midhat Efendi presented to the public opinion the troubles in the early periods of the Ottoman modernization and also solutions to those troubles. The character Felâton Bey who was introduced as a negative model created by modernization was criticized ruthlessly by the author to give a message to the society and define that particular period. However, Felâton Bey and the understanding of "European manners" he represented were not confined to the civil sphere or space. Besides, the environment of

which Felâton Bey was a representative did not occur spontaneously, but appeared as a reflection of the life style of the courtiers and high rank-officials upon society, who personally considered modernization as the sole way of salvation. Hence, in 1875, a short while after the novel was written, the state which had focused on the image of modernization and got into huge debts for this cause would go bankrupt just like Felâton Bey. In this paper, correspondences between the modernization experiences of Felâton Bey and of the Ottoman State will be discussed with reference to the events and people in history.

Keywords: Ahmet Midhat Efendi, Felâton Bey, modernization, European manners, the Ottoman State

When the early Turkish examples of novels are examined just like the ones in Europe, which head out to realize social transformation by guiding the masses, and make implicit or explicit suggestions to remove the hardships faced with on this path in a period when the footsteps of modernization were heard based on the example of Don Quixote, it is not surprising to see that authors acted by the same concern. Despite the same attitude was an issue of the post-Tanzimat poetry, it is a fact that novel, compared to poetry, has had broader opportunities in this particular field, and our novelists have tried to make use of the opportunities offered them by this genre as far as they could. The novelists of the early period, who supported the modernization efforts accelerated after Tanzimat and were aware of the opportunities the novel genre offered them, did not hesitate to present the readers the social problems occurred at the very beginning of this period and the solutions they provided for those problems by acting like a teacher. It is supposed to be considered natural for a novelist to play such a role since he stands between the state and public, but yet is closer to the state, in the Ottoman society experiencing a transformation in every field for the sake of modernization, and prefers to use a clear language addressing to everyone by pushing the care for the art into the background just like in all the periods when a mass or total transformation has been experienced. It is because it was the task, the responsibility of the intellectuals, who were also officers, to inform people about the modernization carried out as a state project in the Ottoman State, to persuade them to what was performed and, the most

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important of all, to prepare a curriculum of modernization the public would perceive and adopt.

To the contrary of their European contemporaries who covered a lot of ground in the field of novel and produced exemplary works considered to be classics today, the Turkish novelist of the early period, being aware of their responsibility, preferred not to become distant from the novel as the narrator but to stay at the center, to make the readers feel their presence every moment, and, in a sense, to keep their addressees under control constantly and direct them. In other words, in the first period, there was a novelist who used the novel as a means to the social benefit, or even had conversation with the reader to persuade him and wrote his work together with the reader. Produced works in accordance with the social requirements based on modernization in the period he lived, and devoted his life to this aim, Ahmet Midhat Efendi was also one of the most profound examples to the type of author in the post-Tanzimat period as described above.

As is known, modernity in the West refers to a process related to the whole life; from art to politics, from daily life to theology. Modernity, of which preparation phase in the West dated back to Renaissance, and which marked rather new situation incomparable to the former ones through the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution in the first half of 19th century and made everyone recognize its power, has exercised influence over the non-Western societies that had held themselves at a distance from this process for a long time and refused some aspects of modernity. Moreover, as experienced in Ottoman case, it obliged them to get involved in this process somehow. Until the abolishment of Janissaries in 1826 and then the declaration of Tanzimat in 1839, the Ottoman State focused mostly on the military and technological aspect of modernity, then especially since the latter date (1839), the State has come to discuss the issue of modernism within a broader framework. This process which was launched first of all to make the state acquire a new vision or aspect including the clothing has gradually penetrated into the public through the guidance and direction of the court and senior bureaucrats and hence taken influence over the daily life. Naturally, this situation has brought about some troubles; reversing the habitual life, common philosophy of life, human relations and economical structure, and getting what was new to substitute for all these sometimes caused reaction and disturbances in the society. However, modernity did not occur free of problems in the West, either. The problems that came up as a result of this process considered to be new for the West were handled considerably within its own logic and in a 300 year-preparation period. In other words, the most important matter related to modernism before the non-Western societies was the matter of time. When it comes to the Ottoman State,

there was a painful process since the Ottoman State, based on a psychology of belatedness and feeling to catch up with the West immediately, wanted to transfer the apparent side of the modernity through its “conclusions” without having a preparation period or establishing the intellectual and philosophical basis.

As a natural result of this process, the modernization attempts in daily life, the changing consumption culture, clothing and ways of behavior or attitudes brought about some problems. This reaction was not only of the traditional classes of the society but also of the modern authors having faith in the necessity of modernization but advocating that modernization was supposed to be practiced for the good of public and society. Trying to direct the modernization process on the social basis through his writings and works, Ahmet Midhat Efendi was in the forefront of those authors.

As a writer, one of the most significant achievements of Ahmet Midhat Efendi was, no doubt, that he could manage to sum up all the unfortunate occurrences in the modernization process of his time under a particular name by the means of a protagonist. This person is Felâton Bey. The character Felâton Bey was fictionalized by Ahmet Midhat Efendi as a criticism of unconscious Westernization or European manners in the period of transition to a consumption society as a natural outcome of modernization, however readers may think Felâton Bey was a severely criticized and extremely fictionalized character. This is natural since Felâton Bey was a depersonalized character whom the author, based on his own points of view, came down hard on and denounced. However, when the other sources, especially the history books and memoirs related to the period when the novel was written in are examined, many people and incidents reminding of Felâton Bey may be determined. Moreover, the fact that some of those people are far worse than Felâton Bey provides us the impression that Ahmet Midhat Efendi might have been wary of presenting the dreadful situations and incidents of his period by the means of a certain character. Nevertheless, in any case, Felâton Bey is a summary of the early modernization process. That is to say, when Felâton Bey is considered as a whole, he is a profound, “alive and vibrant” character capable of representing the troubles, the negative incidents of this field, namely modernization.¹

“Modernization but how?” was a question Ahmet Midhat Efendi was seeking an answer for just like the others in his period did. Hâce-i Evvel’s (meaning The First Teacher) solution to this issue included benefiting from the

¹ For an important article discussing the problem of excessive Westernization [imitating European manners] emerged together with this period, including the Republic period, see Şerif Mardin, “Tanzimat’tan Sonra Aşırı Batılılaşma”, *Türk Modernleşmesi*, Third Edition, Istanbul 1994, p.21-79.

positive sides of Europe in every field on the path to modernization, and while pursuing this, not becoming distant from “the national good manner”, and the most important of all, not consuming the available capital by exaggerating Westernization, namely, funding the Westernization through the value to be added to the present capital. Especially by the means of the last suggestion mentioned above, Ahmet Midhat Efendi emphasized the relationship between modernization and economical structure. This is an important issue because modernity has a vast background, besides, in the first half of 19th century, it influenced and dominated over the whole world through the new elements different from the old ones in such a way that it affects even today’s world; hence it indicates an expensive process with regard to the consumer. Furthermore, the creators of modernity considered themselves “central” but the other countries and societies demanding to participate in this process like the Ottoman State were considered to be “peripheral”; this consideration was the most important matter that the peripheral countries faced with in order to bear this expensive burden. In this unequal casting, considering the peripheral countries the markets in a capitalist sense was a major problem. This process was quite hard for the Ottoman State since the Ottoman State was contributing to the production mechanism of the capitalist system through the cheap raw material, and based on the Baltalimani Treaty of Commerce signed with England in 1838, which reduced the customs duty to the lowest level, the Ottoman State was also one of the greatest purchasers of the goods made of these raw materials. In addition to the center-periphery relationship mentioned above, the fact that the Ottoman State was deprived of bourgeoisie which was considered to be the founding and driving force of modernity in the West by the aspect of culture and economics was the second important difficulty. And the third difficulty was that there was no finance available to cover this whole expensive process. Deprived of the production mechanism, considered a market by the capitalist system and lacked of the financing and the social class required by the system, how could the Ottoman state overcome or accomplish this process? Of course, by the means of the methods peculiar to the peripheral countries. The State which exercised control over everything in this process would take the first steps within its own body or structure in order to be convincing on the path to modernization, hence the State would appear before the public in an image different from the former one. And then, it would transfer some of its economical opportunities and incomes to the high-ranking bureaucrats, the bearers of this image, so, in some way, it would come to create a bourgeoisie. However, the use of the incomes transformed to that class was not production-oriented but completely consumption-oriented. Of course, for this particular attitude, one must not forget the fact that Istanbul has been “a consumer”, not “a producer”, throughout history. In other words, to cover the

financial burden of this new life, the State would not canalize the present capital to production and in this way increase the capital and cover that burden through this income, instead, it would try to cover that burden by spending what was available. When the State ran out of capital or the capital was insufficient, the deficit of the State would be met by borrowing money from abroad. The fact that Westernization lacked a cultural basis or tried to advance by a wrong means was one of the deficiencies of this process. Especially there was the great interest of some certain environments in imitating “European manners”, which were advocating in this field that the old culture must be abandoned completely and the Western culture must be adopted; and in spite of criticisms, they were manifesting their suggestion above through their life styles. This modernization experience which headed out with all those deficiencies bears a resemblance to the situation of a spendthrift who has never produced anything throughout his life, instead, has lived a completely consumption-oriented life, so finally has lost everything he had. Thus, it is not accidental that the characters in our early novels, who shot their wad for the sake of a Western life, were narrated or determined as the spendthrifts just like in the example of Felâton Bey. When this issue is examined from a broad perspective, Felâton Bey whom Ahmet Midhat Efendi presented as the wrong example of Westernization is a character revealing the understanding of Westernization that prevailed among a significant part of society, the state and the senior managers in particular, especially in the period between 1854 and 1875. Eventually, on the path to Westernization, both Felâton Bey and the Ottoman State shared the same fate at the same date. In 1875, a little after the novel Felâton Beyle Rakım Efendi was published, the Ottoman State would be left with absolutely nothing because of the loans spent to cover mostly the Westernization expenses and would declare its bankruptcy just like Felâton Bey.² Being a close witness to his period, Ahmet Midhat Efendi seemed somehow to have foreseen the events. This conclusion which is discussed in this paper in the framework of the resemblance and parallelism between Felâton Bey and the Ottoman State and considered to be comprehensive may become more concrete through giving examples of events and people related to this period.

² As a result of newspaper searches related to the period, based on advertisement published in the newspaper *Basiret*, I determined that the novel Felâton Beyle Rakım Efendi was published on July, 1875. (“The names and prices of the book on sale by Kırkanbar Printing House”, *Basiret*, no.1576, 2 July 1291 (14 July, 1875), 11 Cemaziyelahir 1292, p.4) As the Ottoman State could not pay up its debts borrowed from Europe, it practiced a one-sided debt restructuring on 9 October, 1875. This situation which meant bankruptcy annoyed the demanders a lot. This incident which was realized under the office and functions of the Grand Vizier Mahmud Nedim Pasha would be mentioned in the future among the reasons of dethroning the Sultan Abdülaziz. For further information about this subject, see Haydar Kazgan, *Galata Bankerleri*, Second Edition, Istanbul 2005, p.95-119

The first event to be discussed at this point is the Crimean War between 1853 and 1856, which had a particular importance by its conclusions when our history of Westernization is considered. As is known, the basic nature of the modernization attempts which accelerated after the abolishment of Janissaries and declaration of Tanzimat was that they were mostly confined to the court and state circles as a continuation of what was past or old. In fact, there was no a large-scaled mobility or dynamism socially in the field of Westernization until 1853. During the Crimean War broke out that year, the Ottoman State allied with European countries, England and French in particular, against Russians; and in the war lasted for three years, Istanbul served as the headquarter of allied armies. In the meantime, thousands of Europeans, the military men in particular and some together with their families came to Istanbul. There were vagabonds and adventurers among them. Especially the pioneers of Polini, the mistress of Felâton Bey for whom he spent all his wealth, were among those coming to Istanbul. In spite of the war conditions, a situation such that caused dynamism in the social life of Istanbul. Moreover, the fact that the European countries took sides with the Ottoman state against an ancient enemy like Russia created sympathy in the public for the West. Hence, the composition of the famous song “*Katibim*” is a concrete example of this sympathy. The distance in between was thoroughly covered when ballroom parties in foreign embassies were thrown to celebrate the victory at the end of the war and the high-ranking statesmen and even the sultan Abdülmecid participated to these entertainments. As the Ottoman State was recognized as a European country through the Paris Treaty signed in 1856, the public resistance to the Western civilization was reduced greatly. In such an optimistic atmosphere, a community having European manners would gradually appear in society starting from the upper classes; and the life style of this community would be modeled by the rest of the society. However, all of these would be achieved through not the savings but the loans borrowed from Europe.

The most significant example reminding of Felâton Bey in this period was the sultan Abdülmecid himself. Another feature of this sultan who has been mentioned together with Tanzimat and modernization was that he was open to everything originated from the West. As the following incident indicates, this openness made him go too far when he was angry: he said to a statesman “You traitor! You have betrayed your religion, state and sultan. And also you are a murderer. There is a ritual called duel in Europe. We both should get a gun and fight a duel!” There is no doubt that these words spoken of with anger couldn’t have been realized, in other words, there was no duel.³ However, what is

³ This happened on 27 August, 1858 when the sultan visited Babiali. The person that the sultan reprimanded was Captain of the Seas Damad Mehmed Ali Pasha. See Cevdet Pasha, *Tezâkir* (13-20), edited by Cavit Baysun, Ankara 1960, p.54

significant here, rather than fight the duel, is the attitude of the sultan of that period, affirming this “European ritual” which he considered as a part of being “civilized”.

In the period of the sultan Abdülmecid, the followings may be listed among the negative conclusions of imitating European manners: based on his toleration and to the contrary of the past, the women of the court got involved in daily life; the luxury consumption increased; a concern of following the fashion sprang up and as a result of this, the court borrowed a lot of money from the merchants in Beyoğlu; as the debts could not be paid up, those merchants gathered to protest in front of Babiali and complained about the State to the foreign embassies. Particularly at this point, the expenses of Serfiraz Sultan, the wife of the sultan, and Refia Sultan, the daughter of him, are striking.⁴ As Cevdet Pasha stated, only the money Serfiraz Sultan burnt was almost equal to the annual expenses of the whole Rumeli army. In relation to these incidents, the sultan reacted as:

“They should come to their senses. They have gone too far. I would have them beaten, let alone reprimand them...The sultans [his daughters] go for a walk in the moonlight. I do not have a daughter walking around in the moonlight. I will disown, disinherit them. Now, the actions of those guys dishonor me.”

Even though the sultan complained about his daughters and sons-in-law as stated above, there was not much left for him to do because the sultan was deprived of the power to influence over Serfiraz Sultan and his daughters. Moreover, when he said through an emotional breakdown at his last gasp “I was destroyed by my wives and daughters” in a sense, he confessed that fact. When the sultan Abdülmecid is discussed especially by this aspect, it is possible to see not only Felâton Bey but also Ali Rıza Bey in *Yaprak Dökümü*.⁵

The expenses for Westernization in the period of Abdülmecid, the court’s borrowing money from the shops and exchangers in Beyoğlu, which advanced in their business back then, were also on the agenda of Europeans staying in Istanbul during the Crimean War. The British traveler Lady Hornby who came

⁴ For an important work about the life and personality of Refia Sultan who was one of the most significant figures drawing attention because of her extreme expenses among the women of court in this period, see Ali Akyıldız, *Mümin ve Müsrif Bir Padişah Kızı Refia Sultan*, İstanbul 1998, s.215

⁵ Witnessing closely the changes after the Crimean War especially in the court environments and in the lives of high-ranking statesmen, Cevdet Pasha gives detailed information related to this subject. Approaching the issue by a critical aspect, Pasha cites a lot of anecdotes about the self-indulgence-oriented expenses throughout this period. Especially, in his work titled *Marûzât*, he complains that the women in the court caused difficulties for the state and the sultan could not prevent this. See *Marûzât*, edited by Yusuf Halaçoğlu, İstanbul 1980, p.8-20. The same subject would be on the agenda of Ahmed Lütfi Efendi later, the official historian of the State. Vak’anüvis Ahmed Lütfi Efendi Tarihi, v. IX, ed. Prof. Dr. M. Münir Aktepe, İstanbul 1984, p. 129, 145-146.

to Istanbul in 1855 wrote to his mother: “Everything here is pitiful: the sultan is head over heels in debt. Even he has borrowed from the shops for the jewelry and clothes of his numerous wives; despite of this fact, he still keeps spending a lot to build palaces and buy presents.”⁶ Thus, she indicated that this issue was being talked everywhere.

The detail in one of Lady Horby’s letters to her relatives and friends in England, who was a significant witness of that period, is very striking since it indicates that imitating European manners was not confined to a particular environment; it gradually spread among the lower classes of the society. The Lady was puzzled when an Ottoman officer battling on the side of England against Russia declared his admiration for England, and she had difficulties in understanding how Turkish people could be like that in a short while:

“He felt upset because he could not speak English. We taught him to how to say ‘May God protect the Queen’ in English. He seemed quite satisfied since he could manage to say that. After standing up and belting an English sword, he talked about what he could do in order to be an Englishman and gird himself with that sword to serve the Queen. He took off his fez on his head and threw it to the ground, and waved his fist against the fez. Even though he was sincere, this scene was too heartbreaking. I was pleased when he left...However; I have promised that I would visit her wife living in the lattice house down stairs soon. He said: ‘She still wears that rag, the scarf which is the symbol of slavery. I cannot wait to see the day when that piece of rag is removed from the faces of our women.’”⁷

Through the admiration for the allied powers, this Ottoman officer battling on the side of English and French officers against Russia abandoned his own army and sultan and demanded to be a citizen of another country. This demand of the Ottoman officer may be discussed at the same basis with the negative attitude of Felâtun Bey against the local values. In this comparison, Felâtun Bey even represents a more positive portrait. The negative attitude of Lady Horbny against the Westernization experience in Turkey in the period of Abdülmecid is not limited to the examples above. As a member of the Western civilization, or modernity, she, in a sense, used the advantage of observing as an outsider, and summed up bitterly the experience of Turkey in this field as stating: “Civilization has been launched in a wrong way. Above all, it shows their mindlessness and moral corruption. The worst of them are those who

⁶ Lady Hornby, *Kırım Savaşı Sırasında İstanbul*, translated by Kerem Işık, Istanbul 2007, p.94

⁷ Ibid, p.246

adopted the European manners most.”⁸ Hence, other travelers who came to Istanbul in the same period shared the same idea.⁹

An important incident occurred during the Crimean War was that the Ottoman State borrowed money from the Western countries for the first time in this period. Even though this borrowing was for financing the war, some of it was used for the court expenses mentioned above. However, since these debts could not be paid up, the State had to borrow again. As it can be remembered, Felâtun Bey also got into debt after he spent all his wealth. The positive side of this was that the debts made Felâtun Bey pull himself together and be aware of his flaws. Assigned as a governor, he left Istanbul. He was intended to pay up his debts through the money he was going to save by his salary. However, according to his calculation, paying up all his debts would be achieved “at the age of 90” if he could live that long; even the fact that he could be so determined is meaningful since it indicates what he has accomplished. The Ottoman State which could not be as determined as him declared to Europe on October 1875, namely three months after the novel was published, that it would not be able to pay its debts, hence it adjudged bankrupt and offered a single-sided payment scheme to the demanders. This situation made things difficult for the State. Finally, these debts which were collected regularly as Public Debts Administration was founded in the period of Abdülhamid in 1881 would be over in the period of Republic on the 100th anniversary of the first borrowing from the West, namely in 1954. The year Felâtun Bey estimated to get himself out of debts was 1938. One cannot help thinking that whether this year Ahmet Midhat Efendi set for the debts of Felâtun Bey was actually the author’s prophecy related to the future of the Empire’s debts.

As mentioned above, the periods of Abdülmecid and Abdülaziz were significant since there were severely negative outcomes of modernization attempts in these periods socially and economically. At this point, the two examples that will be mentioned here within the framework of Felâtun Bey both belong to the period of Abdülaziz. In the period of Abdülaziz who ascended to the throne in 1861 after his elder brother Abdülmecid, the relations with the West advanced towards a higher dimension after the sultan’s Europe travel in 1867. This travel was a manifestation of the sultan’s will to develop nearness with the West and increase the cooperation. On the other hand, European princes and the Empress Eugenie of France who set off towards Egypt to attend the opening ceremony of the Suez Canal stopped by Istanbul in 1869. Especially during the visit of Eugenie, the Ottoman protocol was changed in

⁸ Ibid, p.156

⁹ One of them was French La Baronne Durand de Fontmagne. His memoirs were translated into Turkish by Gülçiçek Soytürk in 1977, titled “*Kırım Harbi Sonrasında İstanbul*”

accordance with the Western protocol system. Because of the increasing relationships with the Westerners, the leading statesmen became more interested in foreign language, particularly French. Some of the statesmen who learnt French as a requirement of modernization later wanted to show this not only in diplomatic relations but also in daily life, too; hence, while speaking, they more often than that used a mixed language including both Turkish and French words. Mehmet Kamil Bey, who was the first mayor of Beyoğlu Municipality constituted in 1858 and had been the emcee of foreign affairs for a long time and also was continuing this work in the year novel was written, was one of the statesmen criticized back then, however, he could not give up that will. By this particular aspect, he resembled Bihruz Bey, the character of the novel *Araba Sevdası*, rather than Felâtun Bey. Being the brother-in-law of Fuat Pasha who was one of the powerful pashas of Tanzimat, Mehmet Kamil Bey was so eager to speak French and so willing to manifest his being different from everybody else that he even tried to cite Turkish idioms and proverbs in French. As is known, proverbs and idioms, because of their nature, cannot be translated into another language word by word; that is to say, by the same words in source language. The other languages have other proverbs and idioms formed within the same subject and idea. Kamil Bey wanted to say the idiom “*iş çatallandı*”¹⁰ in French and through translating word by word, he said: “L’affaire est devenue fourchette”¹¹

Kamil Bey had the same attitude for the names of dishes. One day, in his mansion, he was giving a feast to the people of foreign embassies in Istanbul. As it was a custom of these kinds of feasts, a menu was prepared for the guests. On this menu, the names of the dishes were also written in French.

*Kadın budu*¹² [lexically “kadın” means “woman”; “but” means “thigh”-then, woman’s thigh] : Cuisse de Femme,

*Karnıyarık*¹³ [lexically “karın” means “belly”; “yarık” means “slit”-then, the slitted belly]: Ventre fendu,

*Kazandibi*¹⁴ [lexically “kazan” means “caldron”; “dip” means “bottom”-then, the bottom of caldron]: Fond du chaudron,

¹⁰ “iş” literally means “work, affair”; and “çatallanmak”, or “çatal” corresponds to “fork or bifurcate” in English. Here the idiom “*iş çatallandı*” in Turkish means “it has gone complicated”

¹¹ For information about Mehmet Kamil Bey, see Ali Rıza-Mehmed Galib, XIII. Asr-ı Hicrîde Osmanlı Ricalî, (titled Geçen Asırda Devlet Adamlarımız, I-II edited by Fahri Çetin Derin), Istanbul, September 1977

¹² meat and rice croquettes

¹³ whole slitted aubergines with seasoned minced meat filling

¹⁴ white pudding with a caramelized surface

*Sarığiburma*¹⁵ [lexically “sarık” means “turban”; “Burma” means “twisting, twisted”-then, twisted turban] : Turban tordre...

About imitating European manners or acting like Europeans, of course Kamil Bey is not the only person worse than Felâtun Bey. When one takes into account that in many foundations, particularly The Tramway and Railway Enterprise which was founded by the foreign capital in Istanbul, and even in Beyoğlu Municipality, the correspondence and the names of stations were in French, one may think that this matter has acquired a social nature and created an inclination to French by ignoring Turkish especially among the youngsters. Hence, this matter was a major subject criticized by the leading newspapers of that period. Among them, an article particularly on city itself and city culture, published in the newspaper *Basiret* on 9 June, 1871, pointed out that this situation became widespread; and that letter invited everyone to act responsibly. The author of that letter shared one of his experiences with the readers:

“Holding their mother tongue in contempt, most of our youngsters are making a huge mistake and flaw. Without getting distant from the main point here, I have witnessed a strange thing lately; I will narrate it to you now. It is as the following: I visited a friend to have a conversation. Among the people there, I saw someone who had nothing on his head and was smoking the cigarette made of Havana tobacco. While I was wondering who that person was, the watchman of the neighborhood came to the doorstep and yelled as: ‘Sarmaşık in Edirnekapı is on fire!’ Then suddenly, this respected man was frightened, and while giving people around a blank stare, he asked ‘Good Heavens! What was that?’ Even though someone said: ‘Oh, sir, he spoke Turkish; I assume you could understand him’, that man acted as if he had never been to Istanbul before; and in a manner as if he were the grandson of Napoleon, he said angrily because of this incident: ‘If I can be a powerful man one day, I would ban that watchman from yelling like that because there are no such things in Paris or Belgium.’

To sum up, because of that man’s imitating European manners and also his awkward and inappropriate attitude, I was completely puzzled and wondered him, so asked someone near me who he was. He was the son of an important, powerful person; born in a township of Anatolia, he could visit many famous places of Europe thanks to the state and perhaps together with his father. Even though he had lived in Istanbul for about twenty years, I was astonished since he forgot about the Turkish manners and traditions all of a sudden, reacted as if he were French and merely behaved rudely. In other words, what I meant to say is that based on the improper thoughts of such people, should we teach the watchmen of the neighborhood “*ae feu*” and make those poor men cry out so from now on?”¹⁶

¹⁵ A kind of dessert

¹⁶ “Şehir Mektubu-15”, *Basiret*, no. 386, 28 May, 1287 (9 June, 1871), cited by Nuri Sağlam from p. 2-3, *Basiretçi Ali Efendi’nin Şehir Mektupları*, Istanbul 2001, p. 29

Among the attitudes related to European manners mostly mentioned and criticized by the newspapers of that period, there was not only speaking French but also ignoring the local products and demanding the imported products severly; focusing on the subjects that even the Western civilization does not adopt or accept; as directly related to Felâton Bey, spending the available wealth in entertainment places of Beyoğlu, making the money fly; and finally becoming poor and destitute.¹⁷

One of the people having something in common with Felâton Bey in this period was Safvet Pasha who had been abroad for diplomatic service for long years and run the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for six times. Being one of the significant personages of Tanzimat and also the French teacher of Abdülmecid's daughters, Safvet Pasha made a comparison between the cities of Europe and of Istanbul in a letter to his son holding office in Vienna. Approaching the issue from a merely modern urbanization perspective, Safvet Pasha described Istanbul of that time as: "Worse than the worst cities of Europe"; this is a quite thought-provoking consideration. On top of that, pasha was pessimistic about the future of Istanbul and thinking that the capital [Istanbul] would never be reformed or improved because of "the bigotry of the public":

"The worst city of Europe is incomparably superior to our Istanbul, to its Üsküdar[Scutari], Galata and Eyüb...And it should definitely be known that the city Istanbul can never be like even one of the worst cities of Europe since Istanbul's inhabitants are powerless and there is no chance that some of our traditions and habits would change, and also because of some other reasons and conditions. To sum up, the heaviness of the views created by the buildings, streets and shops in Istanbul, including its other bad sides, are inexpressibly horrible, and there is no way of reforming or improving them...It has been almost fifty years since the abolishment of Janissaries whom we consider as the natural enemy of any order or reformation. In this process, we could not manage to arrange or form a neighborhood with two hundred fifty houses, which completely would be equal to one of the cities of Europe. Now, through this comparison, it is clear that how many hundred years would be required so that Istanbul could resemble one of the cities of Vienna."

Stating those thoughts not in a media organ accessible to the public but in a private letter is significant since it indicates how sincere Safvet Pasha was on this particular subject. Held the highest ranks of the State and represented the Ottoman State abroad, Safvet Pasha felt too desperate about his own society and state. Of course, the reasons that he felt so and sympathized with Felâton Bey

¹⁷ The copyright page of one of the similar articles particularly about cities and city cultures published in *Basiret*: No. 1076, 26 Teşrinievvel 1289 (7 November, 1873), cited by Nuri Sağlam from p.1-2, *ibid*, p. 208

should be studied and emphasized. Besides, his sentence at the end of the letter clearly shows his standpoint in the matter of East and West:

"I feel very sorry because I haven't spent at least twenty years of my life in Europe at one or two-year intervals. If I had done so, now I would be delighted by dreaming of the things I had witnessed there during that time."¹⁸

As a conclusion, it can be proposed that the modernization experience of the Ottoman society in the Crimean war and post-Crimean war periods when the Westernization gained acceleration, namely between 1873-1875, corresponds to a modernization experience that can support Ahmet Midhat Efendi in every aspect to form Felâton Bey through his negative sides and to present a summary of the period. When the negative occurrences and troubles related to the modernization in this period are considered, it can easily be suggested that the author did not have difficulty especially in forming the character Felâton Bey and fictionalizing the events this character has been through; and reality assisted the author in this case. However, such an important period, namely Tanzimat, should not be condemned completely because of the troubles and breakdowns experienced. Above all, it is essential not to forget that this period is a significant experience on a true and false-basis for further periods. It is necessary to react normally to the situation occurred in such a period which was caught unprepared by the modernity, without having any substructure; and beyond all those, to try to perceive the period through empathy is essential. Thus, this should be the most productive and accurate approach for everyone today since similar issues are still being experienced.

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¹⁸ Safvet Pasha'nın Bir Mektubu", M. Zeki Pakalın, *Son Sadrazam ve Başvekiller*, v. IV, cited by Mehmet Kaplan from p. 100-102, İnci Enginün, Birol Emil, *Yeni Türk Edebiyatı Antolojisi I*, Istanbul 1988, p. 110-111

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