IF DERSIM WAS A MASSACRE, WHAT WAS THE OTHER THING?

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Category: Opinions

By Ertuğrul Özkök, editor-in-chief of daily Hürriyet ,20 November 2009

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Discussions over the incident are taking a different turn, a turn for settling scores in internal politics. I am not fond of Öymen as a politician. I have criticized him a lot in the past. And I believe his recklessness in this incident harms the CHP.

Still, I cannot help myself but ask the following question: Is the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, benefiting from this ongoing discussion as Öymen continues to harm the CHP?

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Still, I cannot help myself but ask the following question: Is the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, benefiting from this ongoing discussion as Öymen continues to harm the CHP?

Let's make a self-criticism here. Look and see what kind of situations we have to be ready for in the discussions over the Dersim revolt.
Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan chose the words "Dersim massacre" as he was criticizing Öymen's remarks during a plenary session in Parliament. Mr. Prime Minister had issued a statement recently over the "Darfur massacre." He had said, "Muslims don't commit massacre..." (According to some sources, he did not say "don't commit..." but "cannot commit...") Who, then, bombed out caves and cut the throats of Alevi Kurds in Dersim?

Were they "Christian Turks?"

The first beneficial result of the "Dersim" debate is this: That means Muslims do commit, or can commit, massacre. Then we have to take the second step:

We shouldn't withhold a similar categorization for the events in Darfur. If the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir gets offended, we have an excuse in foreign policy then:

"Look my friend! I do call what my own people commit 'massacre' so don't be offended by my remarks."

Let's move on to the bigger issue now. Turkey has tremendously benefited from Öymen's unfortunate remarks over the Dersim revolt. Even I didn't know enough about the Dersim incident, but I have learned now.

Let me make a confession here: I thought that it was one of the 28 suppressions of Kurdish revolts. But now I'm reading books about Dersim. But I haven't been able to get one answer yet: How many people died in the Dersim incident?

I have checked the figures; somewhere between 7,000 and 90,000 people were killed: The second question is this: If the killing of 7,000-90,000 is a "massacre," according to even the most official voice, what then will we call the losses in the Armenian question?

According to Armenian allegations, a total of 1.5 million were killed in 1915. But let's say the death toll was 600,000. How many times more of those who were killed in Dersim? If the number of dead in Dersim was 7,000, it is 200 times more; if 90,000 then 17 times more. Yes, if the Dersim incident was a massacre, then what was the Armenian incident?

Is it called a big massacre, a huge one or a tremendous mass-killing? As this question is posed to the top authority in Turkey, what will be the "official answer?" He will probably say "Don't be hard on yourself. There is a universal term used for that and it starts with 'so-called'…."

The Dersim debate in Parliament means we are refusing our "official history theses." That's fine, but how will we get by with adopting an unofficial political language at home and an official language abroad?

Politicians exploiting the Dersim revolt for electoral should focus on this, too.

My last word is this: Öymen's remarks weren't too clever. But it may not be a good thing to use them as political gimmicks.

If we successfully manage to reveal what was done to our own people in Dersim, then debates over Dersim happen to be extremely useful.