# 02. BAK.MA: THE MAKING OF AN ACTIVIST

### DIGITAL MEDIA ARCHIVE

## ÖZGE ÇELIKASLAN

Independent, non-institutional archiving practice has been both informally and officially regarded as a criminal act in many conflict countries, including Turkey. Having a complex relationship with archiving, some governments forbid and ban any non-sanctioned archival attempts. For instance, in countries like Turkey that have a history of military coups/regimes, state-led discrimination and oppression target dissident communities. The aim is often to annihilate the political memory of leftist, autonomous, and liberation movements, and these efforts have, at times, been met with considerable success. However, despite the oppression, people and collectives have come together around documenting political movements, truth-seeking, and justice struggles to generate their own digital archives as part of their activism over the last decade. These archival infrastructures emerged in response to a variety of sociopolitical needs, including the preservation and circulation of archival material, provision of a social space, advocacy of human rights, and supply of evidence for justice struggles. The level of political oppression, social and historical factors, the strength of dissent, and the cultural connotations of recordkeeping in these countries determine the archiving processes of activists. In this chapter, I examine these phenomena within the scope of *bak.ma digital media archive of social movements* that appeared in Turkey during the Gezi Park protests in 2013.

## The emergence of bak.ma

The story of the emergence of bak.ma can be told in three phases, taking into account political and social conditions in Turkey over the past decade, and how they were transformed by the Gezi Park protests and their aftermath. The first phase was the emergence of bak.ma as an idea during the protests in 2013; one of the significant features of bak.ma is its attachment to the movement during its entire life cycle. The second phase corresponded to the development of the digital archive in 2014. The third phase involved the expansion of its content beyond the Gezi Park collection from 2015. In this contribution I will elaborate on the methods and modes of collecting the footage of bak.maand how traditional and hegemonic forms of data collecting are regenerated in this archive practice; and I look at how new meanings and alliances emerge through the associations of the production processes in the digital archival work through the division of labor, collective data processing, transversal relations among people and groups, and affect. I use my experiences from 2013 until today as a resource for this along with those of the members of the video activist collectives who created and developed bak.ma, namely Videoccupy, vidyokolektif, and Artıkişler (referred to as ‘we’).

I was living in Istanbul when the Gezi Park protest was initiated. In its first days, before the citizens occupied Gezi Park on June 1, I recorded clashes between the protesters and the police with my handycam at different places around Taksim Square. Then, I met two other friends recording the events with various devices, and on June 2, we decided to come together to form a video activist collective. In response to the occupation of the public space, we named our collective Videoccupy, which also corresponded to the occupation of the video medium. Twelve people formed the collective, but many other people – friends and colleagues with different backgrounds, but also video activists, filmmakers, artists, and designers – joined us to record the mass protests, police response, and daily life of the commune that sprang up in Gezi Park, from the day the citizens occupied it until the evening the police attacked, burned the tents, and brutally removed protestors two weeks later, on June 15.

Videoccupy had set itself the goal of documenting the peaceful intent of the resistance movement which was trying to keep open the public space. As collective members, we created our own media to reveal police violence toward protestors exercising their democratic rights but being portrayed in the mainstream Turkish media as offensive, unfair, and predatory ‘looters’ (*çapulcular*), as designated by Prime Minister Erdoğan. We shot and edited short videos and shared them on our YouTube page[[1]](#footnote-1) and circulated the links through social media accounts and email groups.

Videoccupy members thus came together to realize a unique project, one that also differed from various those of other media groups[[2]](#footnote-2) that emerged to broadcast the news from the protesters’ perspective.[[3]](#footnote-3) We recorded the resistance with video activist tools and tactics. We split into groups. Some of us recorded daily life at the park[[4]](#footnote-4) while others recorded demonstrations on Istiklal Street, rallies in Taksim Square, and clashes on streets, boulevards, and squares at different locations of Istanbul.

Many protestors also recorded the events on their mobile phones, tablets, and handycams. We decided to collect these recordings when we realized that the resistance would become a milestone event in the country’s history, but we had other reasons as well. We could not go to every protest, event, and meeting, and we could not record the events in other cities and towns; many people recorded those events and deleted their videos after sharing them on social media. We anticipated that protestors’ recordings will be lost sooner or later. Live broadcasting was another form widely used by the activists, and it was also one of the effective tools of Gezi Park media. Although effective at the time of the incident, it does not have an afterlife due to the disappearance of the link, pages, and the effectiveness of the moment. Thus, almost all live broadcasting collectives themselves disappeared right after the resistance. Therefore, we aimed to rescue these recordings by assembling them on a platform.

We wrote a call and circulated it via our networks. From the earliest days of the protests to the end of the occupation and its aftermath, Videoccupy repeatedly announced its project to the public. The first call was made on June 4.[[5]](#footnote-5) Following the call, we received recordings from the people who attended protests and shot their testimonies with their devices. At the same time, we collected video recordings in Gezi Park at the shared booth of activist collectives.

Eventually, we aimed to create an open-access video archive of the Gezi Park protests comprising all this collected material. Meanwhile, rushing about from one place to another, we discussed making this collection available to the public as soon as possible. Indeed, many journalists, researchers, and filmmakers were trying to reach us to access the collected material. Access to the collection needed to be immediate, so we endeavored to find the most efficient form. Our initial idea was to copy hard drives and leave copies at the buildings of the Taksim Solidarity Platform and Chamber of Architects.

With a mission similar to that of the Occupy Wall Street Archives Working Group (OWS), we wanted to own our resistance by keeping its records and guaranteeing that our history would be accessible to the public. Kylie Message emphasizes the role of the OWS archive as ‘the main instrument of resistance and the main vehicle through which they advocated for the Occupy movement’.[[6]](#footnote-6) Message remarks that the majority of the Occupy Wall Street collection was transferred to the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives located at New York University between 2013 and 2017. Similarly, we also believed that Videoccupy’s archive would be a major resource for the public by offering a record of the protests. However, we did not want to hand over the collection to an institutional library or an archive as we preferred to stay independent and autonomous.

We acknowledged the practice of publicizing the collection as remission, which means giving the recordings back to the people and returning the memories of the resistance to the collection’s owners. Accordingly, we researched different possibilities for public accessibility. A physical location seemed easy and practical at first. However, since we were dealing with a digital collection, it required a basic categorization on the hard drives. The video files on hard drives could only be organized by date, time, or place or by the content of the events in many subfolders, which would complicate the process for users and also us. Since there would only be a limited search engine, users would not be able to easily find what they were looking for. Therefore, we decided to look for cloud storage options.

We consulted with IT specialists and software developers and learned that cloud storage would not be possible for several reasons. AWS Storage Service was the most easily accessible and widely used cloud storage. It belongs to Amazon, the American multinational technology company focusing on e-commerce, cloud computing, digital streaming, and artificial intelligence. Amazon is one of the biggest IT companies, alongside Alphabet, Apple, Meta, and Microsoft. These companies effectively govern the internet: Amazon runs e-commerce, Apple has the hardware, Meta controls social networking, and Microsoft dominates business software.[[7]](#footnote-7) Cloud storage accessibility, reliability, and safety seemed unconvincing because of their centralized data collection system, and we further estimated that cloud storage would become financially difficult because of its over costing service. Most importantly, security would be a problem. After long discussions, therefore, we decided not to use cloud options because of their connection with the internet monopoly.

Meanwhile, we discovered Pad.ma,[[8]](#footnote-8) an online archive of text-annotated video material, footage, and unfinished films from India. We were impressed by Pad.ma because its entire collection is searchable, viewable online, and free to download. The archive is based on pan.do/ra,[[9]](#footnote-9) an open-source media archive software. As the creators of Pad.ma explain,[[10]](#footnote-10) the archival design allows for various possible types of viewing and contextualization, from an overview of themes and timelines through much closer readings of transcribed dialogue and geographical locations to layers of writing on the image material. In addition, archive users can upload video files and enter descriptions, keywords, and other annotations to be placed on the timelines. Creating an organized online public archive would be difficult considering the dynamism of the period and our conditions as we were at the first stage of publicizing an activist video collection.

It took a long time to start using pan.do/ra because immediately after the police evacuated Gezi Park, the collective’s structure also changed. We left our temporary office near the park, and some members returned to their jobs. However, those who were still willing to record the aftermath of Gezi documented various forms of ongoing protests, such as the park forums, NGO press releases, mass gatherings to stand against the brutality and human rights violations committed by the police, and commemorations for the protestors who lost their lives during the protests.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The group split into two subgroups that kept collaborating while working on different tasks for a few more months. Along with maintaining our internal communication, filming on site, collecting protester’s footage via online transfer services: these were our main activities in the first phase of bak.ma. Before recounting the second phase, the intertwinement of collective action in Gezi Park and the emergence of bak.ma should be clarified.

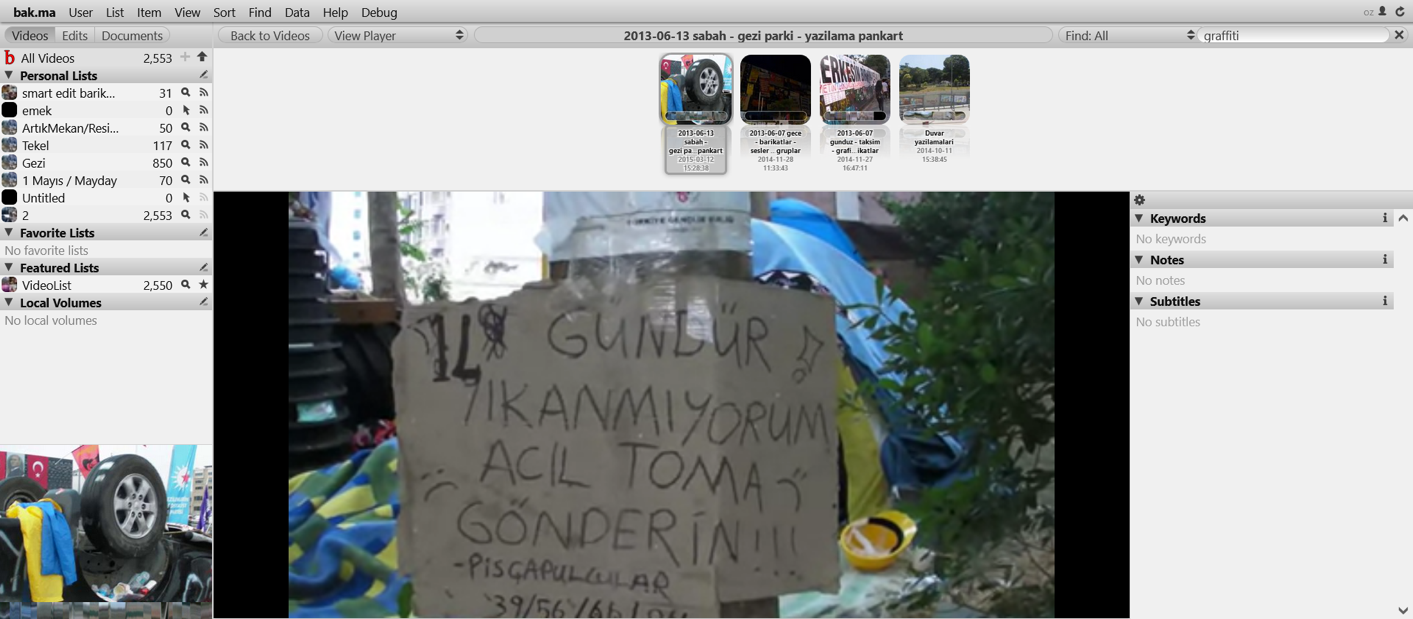


Fig. 2.1. Still from bak.ma, excerpt from screenshot of the video file ‘2013-06-13 Yazılamalar ve Pankartlar’ (bak.ma 2014). All content on bak.ma is available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 License.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The Gezi commune should be conceived as an amorphous, bigger collective body that included smaller collectivities and networks. People spontaneously gathered and formed collectives in the park, mobilizing and sharing information about the resistance process, maintaining safety and solidarity, initiating councils and neighborhood assemblies, and disseminating press releases and news from the inside within non-hierarchical, autonomous, gender-inclusive, and non-discriminatory structures. These collectivities created the ‘Gezi spirit’. McGarry et al. claim that the ‘Gezi spirit denotes the enactment of solidarity rather than a collective identity so that performing solidarity is created through different voices being heard’.[[13]](#footnote-13) Those different voices were heard via their resistance and solidarity in action but also via social media and the protestors’ dedicated Gezi media.[[14]](#footnote-14) Gezi media was an important part of the Gezi commune. Countless alternative media platforms appeared in various forms during the protests, in guerrilla television channels as well as live video form, through video activist groups,[[15]](#footnote-15) and via newspapers, journals, radio stations, social media platforms, blogs, and webpages. News, videos, and photographs from the park were circulated from the perspective of the communers.

Video activism aims to unveil sociopolitically disregarded and neglected incidents, people, and phenomena. Thus, activist media, specifically video activism, was recognized for the first time in Turkey during the Gezi Park protests. Ülkü Doğanay and İlkay Kara offer three main reasons for this: 1) mainstream media was not the only source of information for citizens 2) video activism made the demands of the protestors more visible, and 3) it gave crucial encouragement to citizens to participate.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The multiple video activisms that emerged and spread during the Gezi Park protests portrayed a multitude of oppositional voices. The video activist documentation also provided images that were legally admissible as evidence. The evidential value of the footage was acknowledged both during and after the protests. At the time, it constituted a partial control mechanism over state brutality, since security forces were aware that they could easily be filmed and individuals identified in subsequent investigations. In the case of Ethem Sarısülük’s murder by the police, the perpetrator was identified using a video stream recorded by one of the demonstrators.[[17]](#footnote-17) The video recordings of Gezi media were used as evidence by volunteer lawyers and human rights advocates who formed the Gezi Law platform to monitor the detentions, defend the rights of detainees, and file lawsuits.

Activist collectives are generally nondurable, but their impact can be more effective than many permanent structures. As Özge Özdüzen describes, Videoccupy was a temporary ‘single-event focused initiative’ that ‘remained as a symbol of the Gezi protests’.[[18]](#footnote-18) Immediately after Videoccupy’s dissolution, those of us who could devote our time and labor to the archiving process decided to create another collective. Motivated by the spirit of the time, forming such an infrastructure was easy, and we were able to maintain the collective identity.

## Taking the archive out on the streets

The second phase in the emergence of bak.ma involved accordingly the formation of another video activist collective to generate the archive. Seven female members of Videoccupy thus created and organized vidyokolektif. We formed the collective as an extension of the whole process to understand, digest, and re-produce together, and we went on to record further protests and commemorations, edit short videos, and share them on our YouTube channel.[[19]](#footnote-19) We worked on organizing the archival footage and searching for an open-access portal. Slowly, vidyokolektif emerged as a feminist video activist collective. Not all the members identified themselves as feminists initially, but we became convinced over time of the appropriateness of using our medium with a feminist approach. In short, we had emotional and political reasons for forming a women’s collective—but we also had a mission: we wanted to set up the archive because we cared about the footage and wanted to publicize the video collections.

Women are traditionally associated with care. In the case of vidyokolektif, instead of the traditional connotations of care in society, I think about care as associated with feminism and with respect for archival material. Fisher and Tronto’s article reconceptualizing caring from a feminist perspective steers me to consider our archival work as carework.[[20]](#footnote-20) Fisher and Tronto define care as the activities people do to maintain, continue, and repair the world that includes human bodies and the environment and their intertwinement within a complex and life-sustaining web.[[21]](#footnote-21)

According to Alam and Houston, this definition ‘helps expand care ethics beyond its conceptualization within social science and health research as an informal, essentialised, gendered-based activity’.[[22]](#footnote-22) It suggests approaching care not as narrowly associated with domestic labor as identified with women but expansively, associating it with the environment and maintaining human and non-human relations. Alam and Houston thus discuss care as an alternate infrastructure. They claim that the ‘feminist ethics of care shift away from the universal, abstract, principles of morality and justice’ and advocate for ‘more attention to ‘a situated response to unjust situations’ by recognizing the relational, interdependent and unequal capacities of care actors’.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The feminist ethics of care that emerged in our collective experience was fragile, relational, and an embodied practice. Thus, vidyokolektif transformed into an infrastructure of care that we created and nurtured to empower one another as we discussed, shared, produced, and relived together. We reflected on our relationship with the sensitive archival material and on how to organize the raw footage and edited material.

In their article on the ethics of feminist care in archival work, Caswell and Cifor argue that ‘an ethics of care is an inclusive and apt model for envisioning and enacting justice in archival contexts’.[[24]](#footnote-24) They also emphasize relationality and the responsibilities raised by connections. Caswell and Cifor propose four interrelated shifts based on radical empathy in archival relationships: between archives and records creators, between archivists and records subjects, between archivists and records users, and between archivists and larger communities implicated within their records.[[25]](#footnote-25) Their conception of ‘archivists as caregivers bound to records creators, subjects, users, and communities through a web of mutual affective responsibility’[[26]](#footnote-26) reflects vidyokolektif’s experience.

Daniela Agostinho underlines the ‘affective orientation’ that Caswell and Cifor associate with the ethical responsibilities of the archivist who cares about, for, and with subjects, claiming that this ‘represents a radical shift in the archival encounter, premised as it is on ethical responsibility rather than liberal modes of access and legal rights’.[[27]](#footnote-27) We developed a mutual responsibility between us and the video records, events, protestors, commoners, potential users, other collectives, the Gezi spirit, and the commune. By developing a feminist ethics of care within vidyokolektif, we carried the work to another level.

At this point we decided to use pan.do/ra software as it allows users to manage large, decentralized video collections and collaborative creations of metadata and time-based annotations online and serves as a web application. Archive users have a mission in most of the pan.do/ra archives; such mission differs from a visitor or a researcher in the archive in its traditional sense. Users are generating the archive together collaboratively.[[28]](#footnote-28) The collaborative ethos and open-source software vision of pan.do/ra as embodying the knowledge-sharing philosophy of the copyleft movement corresponded to our practice. Thus, following the initial online meetings with the software developers, we organized a workshop in Istanbul to learn the software and launch the uploading. Finally, in June 2014, during the first anniversary of the Gezi Park protests, the uploading process started with samples of rough footage from the collection on the website.

We considered titles for the online archive that would be in tune with our practice. Referring to our previous discussions, we agreed on ‘bak.ma’, which means ‘do not look’ in Turkish. We used the URL extension ‘.ma’ for ‘media archive’, which is Morocco’s national URL extension. Using an URL extension for another country also helped us with security issues and to establish a kinship with Pad.ma.

The inspiration for naming the archive ‘bak.ma’ had come from our internal discussions in Videoccupy and vidyokolektif. We shared quotations from Cypriot thinker Ulus S. Baker on our social media channels, one of which addressed a police announcement in 1995 that became part of our internal discussions during the protests as we witnessed similar police announcements.[[29]](#footnote-29) The police announcement entailed ordering normal citizens passing through the protest area by chance not to look because police forces were planning to commit violence, and normal citizens should not witness it. From the beginning of our video activist and archiving practice, we discussed the differences between seeing and looking, looking and acting, and how our video practice disrupted mainstream media’s manipulative and authoritative gaze. Video activists testified to the police violence and human rights abuses. For them, the video becomes the eye of citizens.

The name ‘bak.ma’ was chosen for the archive for other reasons, also. We were there to see, and these were testimonials. Moreover, we thought that users might be prompted by this name to enter the archive and browse, and see. But bak.ma is not only about looking and seeing; there are many significant characteristics that pan.do/ra software provides and includes in the archive. Not only does pan.do/ra serve the main default options of viewing, uploading, downloading, categorization, and annotations, but it also ensures the accessibility of the archive and admits collective creation, participation, and collaboration. In general, digital activist archives prioritize archival access, but not all are open to public participation and collaboration when it comes to building the archive. They usually provide access to their data via file-sharing programs, but users and visitors cannot upload files. Some of those archives are event-based and are not open to data transfer regarding their restricted context.[[30]](#footnote-30)

In June 2014, we created a publicly accessible portal, but the content was still missing because uploading 4TB of data corresponding to more than 800 hours of video footage was difficult. The most practical way to upload that amount of data was ‘mass uploading’, which requires several desktop computers to run with Linux/Ubuntu. Another member of Videoccupy, who was familiar with coding and programming, undertook with me the task of uploading the footage. After long hours of co-working, we uploaded the entire content before the end of the year. Mass uploading requires full-capacity computers, so we worked at computer labs.

After uploading the video archive of Gezi generated by the members of Videoccupy and vidyokolektif, bak.ma was ready for inclusion in more collections. Between 2013 and 2015, the goal was achieved, and an online archive was created, comprising the Gezi collection. The fundamental structure was constituted. However, it required further archival work, such as categorizing the collection, creating metadata, and entering annotations, keywords, and necessary information in the archive. There were already a few people who had joined Videoccupy and vidyokolektif from my previous video collective, Artıkişler (leftoverworks), and we decided to do the archival work.[[31]](#footnote-31)

## Expanding the archive and its affective potentials

The third phase of bak.ma began when Artıkişler undertook to do the work of organizing the archive and producing its metadata with the support of a few members of Videoccupy and vidyokolektif. Besides working in the archive, we decided to upload our own collections comprising video recordings of earlier political events. Then, we collected archival footage from syndicates, activist collectives, and human rights organizations in 2015 and 2016. We were invited to present the archive in Turkey and abroad by various organizations, where we were able to meet individuals and groups who were interested in collaboration. The openness, participatory approach, autonomous, and collective structure of bak.ma drew much attention. Many people and groups were interested in contributing to using the archive, uploading videos, and participating in making the archive, and some contributed to the archive with their own collections and video footage of specific political events.

A guerilla tv network, Sendika TV (Syndicate TV),[[32]](#footnote-32) gave us tapes, video CDs, and digital video discs that had been rescued from police raids in the basement of their office in Ankara. They asked us to digitalize the videotapes and upload them on bak.ma with the rest of the other material. While watching the footage, we realized that most of the footage belongs to the ‘Tekel Workers’ Resistance’.[[33]](#footnote-33) The rest documented various political events, including the May day celebrations between 1977 and 2015. We rescued nearly 90 percent of the Syndicate TV videotape collection from decay. Unfortunately, the tapes had been damaged by the poor preservation conditions, mostly from dust and humidity.

The Tekel Resistance was linked to the Gezi Park protests in the way it demonstrated the power of a struggle for rights and built solidarity networks across the country which paved the way for the Gezi protests. Only after watching hours of footage did I realize this. In the occupied area, in a central part of Ankara, the workers created a ‘tent city’ like in Gezi Park. Every day was filled with actions, including marches, strikes, rallies, gatherings, concerts, film screenings, talks, and demonstrations. The resistance was a key moment in the history of social movements in Turkey since it not only expressed a class-conscious politics and solidarity but also conquered fears around occupying and commoning in public spaces.

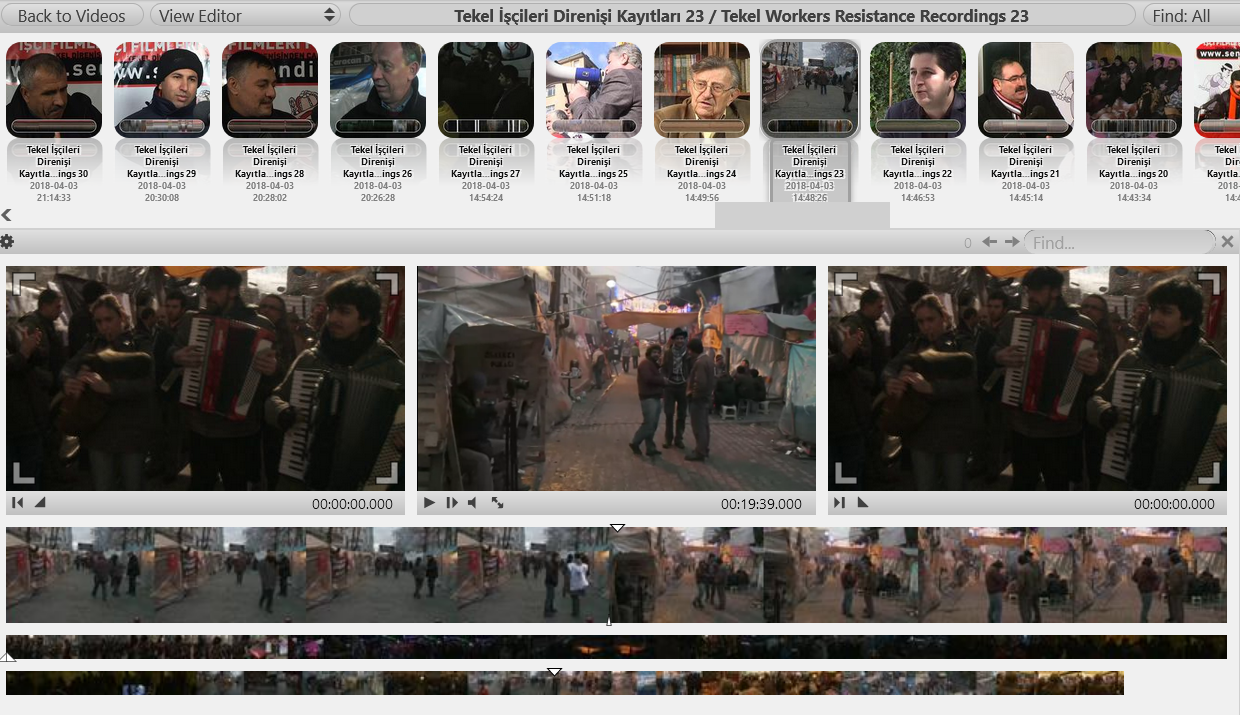


Fig. 2.2. Still from bak.ma, excerpt from screenshot of the video file ‘Tekel İşçileri Direnişi Kayıtları 23 / Tekel Workers Resistance Recordings 23’, (bak.ma 2015). All content on bak.ma is available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 License.

I had visited the tent city several times and joined the demonstrations at the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010, but only after watching the video footage could I fully comprehend the resistance in all its aspects. This experience is in line with the point made by Kate Eichhorn with respect to feminist archives; namely, that alternative archives are a site for knowledge production.[[34]](#footnote-34) Rather than searching for preproduced knowledge in places and ways that erase ideas, Eichhorn invites the reader to engage in the ‘making of archives’ as this is often ‘where knowledge production begins’.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Archives are not only resources for knowledge and information. Thus, Buchanan and Bastian underline the need to ’shift from seeing archives as purely informational repositories, to a wider understanding of users’ relationships to records, in particular the affective contours of this relationship’.[[36]](#footnote-36) Activist archives are not just about justice and rights but also about trauma and grief, victory and defeat, brutality and intimacy, banality and compassion, and the quotidian routines of daily life. They are testimonies to the individual spirit, to people in action, and are laden with affect, overflowing with feeling, and deeply expressive of human emotion.

Accordingly, Cifor proposes affect as an underlying factor in archival scholarship and practice.[[37]](#footnote-37) Affect, she argues, is a central component of social justice work: ‘the pain of others that can be found in archives does not simply belong to others; rather, as inevitable witnesses to such pain, archivists are deeply implicated in webs of affective relations’.[[38]](#footnote-38) Cifor speaks about ‘emotional justice’ as something that needs to be expanded in the archival field and its ethical orientation. For me, the bak.ma collections are about rights and justice as much as they are about affect.

Collecting and collating footage as well as the archival work of record-making and -keeping lead to interlacing affective relations with the content, its creators, and their collaborations. Similarly, in the ‘10 Theses on the Archive’, co-founders of Pad.ma suggest we think of the ‘affective potential’ of the archive as there is ‘both a political as well as an aesthetic question in its ability to activate one’s capacity to act, and it is on the very faculty of imagination and possibility that this conflict is located’.[[39]](#footnote-39) The affective potential of activist archives comes from relations among people and groups and the connections between them and political events. They reach deep into belonging and empowerment, reminiscence about past losses and achievements, and ongoing hopes for the future.

The affective potential of activist archives is realized in the formation of a basis for public debate. As Duygu Doğan and Sidar Bayram argue, the visual records in these archives contribute to creating public spaces beyond the juridical space, including academic institutions and human rights initiatives but also wider artistic and cultural spaces.[[40]](#footnote-40) The emergence of accountability and the potential of judicial remedy depends on human agency and the publicity that comes together around these records. When this kind of publicity is not possible and injust conditions persist, these records preserve and bring their tacit potential to the future, argue Doğan and Bayram.[[41]](#footnote-41) Thus, such archives are powerful mobilizers of knowledge and memory that can create global accountability with a force that encompasses not just the past, but also the present and future.

## Connecting movements: present and future

Bak.ma continued to grow in 2016 as we collected further collections from video activist collectives. A mission developed of rescuing footage before it was lost to decay or to wastebins, physical or virtual. In this way, bak.ma created a kind of juxtaposition between social and political movements in Turkey and the leftover images of other groups and collectives. This enabled different archival sites of knowledge to be linked to each other in digital space.

Through this work, parallelisms among the movements, both major and minor, became increasingly apparent and available, as in the case of Gezi and Tekel. Digital activist archives enable us to create these contexts, affinities, and narratives. They play a significant role in connecting movements, joining and combining what may otherwise seem separated and distant. They can meet under the same tags and annotations or by being aligned, side-by-side and one under the other. New, nonlinear stories, mappings, and timelines are thereby created on the archive.

Alongside collecting the residual images of others, bak.ma continued to document current political events and social issues. Starting in 2018, it crossed geographical limits and embraced transnational collaborations. People and collectives from other countries uploaded their video recordings, texts, photographs, and sound recordings onto the bak.ma archive. Many people, including previous members of Videoccupy and vidyokolektif as well as anonymous users, were engaged in this third phase of the archive. As of 2021, bak.ma has not been administered by a specific group or organization. Instead, software developers sustain the online accessibility of the archive, and a few admins are responsible for the stewardship. Users generate the archival content since they are automatically granted the permission to download and upload static files and moving images.[[42]](#footnote-42) The number of users varies. At the time of writing, in 2022, there were 252 signed-up users. Users are composed of 246 members and six admins. They can create content and access all publicly shared videos and documents. In addition, they can organize, annotate, and edit videos and other documents.[[43]](#footnote-43)

The bak.ma video collections consist of audiovisual media of different formats and lengths but mostly digital raw footage of activist recordings, feature documentaries, and short films. As bak.ma is an ever-expanding archive, the size of these collections changes over time. It is also an archive in progress; classification and annotation of the collections are ongoing operations. Thus far, the greatest effort has gone into the preservation, accessibility, and maintenance of the video collections and the website. Admins and users have been focused on the fundamental constitutional needs of bak.ma rather than on further expanding and improving the archive. Many efforts have been made to keep the online archive alive – covering the yearly software expenses and the costs of renewal of hard drives and domain.

Structural problems experienced at bak.ma, including the coordination of the workflow among the volunteers and the lack of financial sources, make the archive’s future uncertain; its admins and editors cannot constantly fix problems as they arise. In general, if resources are limited, then the labor, space, time, financing, and knowledge limitations of activist archives mean they encounter difficulties in sustaining their work. The lack of a curatorial and organizational order is a common problem that directly affects maintenance. Deficient financial sources cause a lack of coordination and loss of labor. The voluntary basis of the workflow is not very efficient, since sustaining a systematic archival workflow requires the input guarantee supplied by paid workers, and most grants and funds do not cover staff costs. Activist archives have to tackle this problem since it hinders their sustainability.

However, activists do not have to tackle these problems from within discrete silos. I have observed a strong sense of isolation among activists because of a lack of communication between those involved in different initiatives. More connectedness between different activists involved in archiving is needed for the structural problems to be overcome. Since these archives are based on the reproduction of relations, then solidarity, collaboration, and connection among the actors of activist, autonomous infrastructures, commons, and collectives are key principles to maintain them. The solidarity networks will definitely empower these practices, provide solutions to their problems, and ensure the maintenance of the archival work. Accordingly, bak.ma also will maintain itself as long as it stays in relation with others of like mind, in alliances, and to the extent that it responds to the needs of its users, visitors who devote themselves to care for archival material.

## Conclusion

Through its archival footage, bak.ma invites us to discuss power structures, the disruption of social inequalities, and labor conditions, both in Turkey and transnationally. Mobilized activist archival footage enables us to correlate important political events in history and comprehend today’s authoritarian politics in a broader context. Thus, bak.ma addresses the need for collaborative archiving practices in conflict-affected areas as part of the struggle for human rights, justice, freedom of speech, and the right to access knowledge. By housing records of activist collectives, bak.ma becomes their collective memory, and the archive becomes an agent for testimony as material witness. Via the lens(es) of bak.ma, users and visitors can take a close look at a political history that transforms the way of seeing. This look leads to a mutual, affective sense of responsibility between the subjects and objects of the action. Encountering fragile and sensitive archival material is an emotional process. My investigation of the historiography of bak.ma has shown that emotional connectedness and affective responsibility are grounded in a caring that transforms our relations with the past and present and shapes future actions.

## References

Agostinho, Daniela. ‘Care’ in Nanna Bonde Thylstrup, Daniela Agostinho, Annie Ring, Catherine D’Ignazio and Kristin Veel (eds), Uncertain Archives: Critical Keywords for Big Data, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2021, 75–87.

Alam, Ashraful and Houston, Donna. ‘Rethinking Care as Alternate Infrastructure’, Cities 100 (2020): 1–10.

Amnesty International (2013). ‘Gezi Park Protests: Brutal Denial of the Right to Peaceful Assembly in Turkey’. 2 October 2013, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/022/2013/en/>

Anand, Shaina. ‘10 Thesis on the Archive’ in Özge Çelikaslan, Alper Şen and Pelin Tan (eds), *Autonomous Archiving*, Barcelona: dpr-barcelona, 2016, 79–97.

Arnao, Zander. ‘Why Monopolies Rule the Internet and How We Can Stop Them’, *The Gate*, 2 January 2022, <http://uchicagogate.com/articles/2022/1/4/why-monopolies-rule-internet-and-how-we-can-stop-them/>

Baker, S. Ulus. ‘Ölüm Orucu – Notlar’, Birikim 88, 1996, <https://bak.ma/documents/YY>

Buchanan, Alexandrina and Bastian, Michelle. ‘Activating the Archive: Rethinking the Role of Traditional Archives for Local Activist Projects’, *Archival Science* 15 (2015): 429–451.

Caswell, Michelle and Cifor, Marika. ‘From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives’, Archivaria 81 (2016): 23–43.

Cifor, Marika. ‘Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect Theory to Archival Discourse’, Archival Science 15 (2015): 1–25.

Doğan, Duygu and Bayram, Sidar. ‘Görsel Kayıtlar Hesap Sorabilir mi?: İnsan Hakları Arşivleri ve Geçiş Dönemi Adaleti’. Türkiye’de Geçiş Dönemi Adaleti: Dönüşen Özneler, Yöntemler, Araçlar, Istanbul: Hakikat Adalet Hafıza Merkezi, 2020, 206–220.

Doğanay, Ülkü and Kara, İlkay. ‘Video Activism in Turkey as a Case of Alternative Media Practice: Gezi Resistance in Focus’ in Dilek Beybin Kejanlıoğlu and Salvatore Scifo (eds), Alternative Media and Participation: Interviews and Essays, Istanbul: COST Action IS0906 Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies, 2014, 10–14.

Eichhorn, Kate. *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014.

Fisher, Berenice and Tronto, Joan. ‘Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring’ in Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson (eds), Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women’s Lives, Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, 35–62.

McGarry, Aidan, Erhart, Itir, Eslen-Ziya, Hande, Jenzen, Olu and Korkut, Umut. ‘Introduction’ in Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Olu Jenzen, and Umut Korkut (eds), The Aesthetics of Global Protest Visual Culture and Communication, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020, 15–38.

Message, Kylie. Collecting Activism, Archiving Occupy Wall Street, New York: Routledge, 2019.

Özdüzen, Özge. ‘Bearing Witness to Authoritarianism and Commoning through Video Activism and Political Film-making After the Gezi Protests’ in Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Olu Jenzen, and Umut Korkut (eds), The Aesthetics of Global Protest Visual Culture and Communication, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020, 191–210.

Pad.ma Public Access Digital Media Archive. ‘About’, Pad.ma, <https://pad.ma/>about

1. Videoccupy YouTube page, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDhtsYy5VC09T0ixjHmhBQQ/videos> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Among the media collectives were Çapul TV (Loot TV), Naber Medya (What’s up Media), Kamera Sokak (Camera Street), çekimyapankadınlar (womenrecording), Seyri Sokak (Street Watch), İnadına Haber (News Out-of-Spite), and Ankara Eylem Vakti (Ankara Time to Act). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. When the protest transformed into a mass event attacked by the police on the afternoon of May 31, the news channel CNN Türk did not change its programming to cover the events and was widely lampooned for continuing to broadcast a documentary about penguins. This failure became symbolic; the name ‘penguin media’ was soon adopted by the protestors and penguins became one of several stock images in highly effective and creative collective humor expressed in activists’ social media posts, graffiti and other art and shared in photographs and videos. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Gezi Park Günlüğü / Gezi Park Diary,* <https://bak.ma/CRT/player> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Videoccupy’s call, <https://bak.ma/documents/YX> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Kylie Message, *Collecting Activism, Archiving Occupy Wall Street*, London-New York: Routledge, 2019, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Zander Arnao, ‘Why Monopolies Rule the Internet and How We Can Stop Them’, *The Gate*, 2 January 2022, <http://uchicagogate.com/articles/2022/1/4/why-monopolies-rule-internet-and-how-we-can-stop-them/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Pad.ma (Public Access Digital Media Archive), <https://pad.ma/home>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Pan.do/ra, <http://pan.do/ra>. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Pad.ma, ‘About’, <https://pad.ma/about>. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Thousands of people attended funerals and commemorations for Berkin Elvan, a 14-year-old boy shot in the head by a tear gas cartridge; having struggled for 269 days, Elvan lost his life in the morning hours of March 11, 2014. Ali İsmail Korkmaz, a 19-year-old student, joined the protests in Eskişehir province; he escaped to the city’s side streets, where he was beaten to death by plainclothes police officers, and, after struggling for his life in a coma for 38 days, lost his life on July 10, 2013. In addition to Berkin Elvan and Ali İsmail Korkmaz, other victims who became heroes and symbols of the resistance included Ahmet Atakan, Ethem Sarısülük, Abdullah Cömert, Mehmet Ayvalıtaş, Hasan Ferit Gedik and Medeni Yıldırım. For further information, see ‘Amnesty International’s Gezi Park Report’, 2013, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/022/2013/en/> and Bianet Independent Communication Network, <https://m.bianet.org/konu/gezi>. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Poster: ‘Urgent: I haven’t washed for two days, send a TOMA [Police Water Canon Vehicle] here’. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Olu Jenzen and Umut Korkut, ‘Introduction’ in Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Olu Jenzen and Umut Korkut (eds), The Aesthetics of Global Protest Visual Culture and Communication, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020, 15–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In the (Turkish language) video, ‘Neden Gezi Parkındayız?’ (Why Are We in Gezi Park?), protestors respond to the question, https://bak.ma/ASV/player. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Seyri Sokak (Street Watch), Videoccupy, İnadına Haber (News Out-of-Spite), Çapul TV (Loot TV), Naber Medya (What’s up Media), Kamera Sokak (Camera Street), çekimyapankadınlar (womenrecording), and Ankara Eylem Vakti (Ankara Time to Act) were among the video activist groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ülkü Doğanay and İlkay Kara, ‘Video Activism in Turkey as a Case of Alternative Media Practice: Gezi Resistance in Focus’, in Dilek Beybin Kejanlıoğlu and Salvatore Scifo (eds), Alternative Media and Participation: Interviews and Essays., Istanbul: COST Action IS0906 Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies, 2014, 10–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Doğanay and Kara ‘’Video Activism in Turkey’: 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Özge Özdüzen, ‘Bearing Witness to Authoritarianism and Commoning through Video Activism and Political Film-making after the Gezi Protests’, in Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Olu Jenzen and Umut Korkut (eds), The Aesthetics of Global Protest Visual Culture and Communication, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020, 191–210. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. vidyokolektif YouTube page, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6wxs6-4tb9vYGmj8E4cuXA/videos> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto, ‘Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring’ in Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson (eds), Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women’s Lives, Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, 35–62. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Fisher and Toronto, ‘Toward a Feminist Theory’: 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ashraful Alam and Donna Houston, ‘Rethinking Care as Alternate Infrastructure’, Cities 100 (2020): 1–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Alam and Houston, ‘Rethinking Care’: 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, ‘From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives’, Archivaria 81 (2016): 23–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Caswell and Cifor, ‘From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics’: 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Caswell and Cifor, ‘From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics’: 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Daniela Agostinho, ‘Care’ in Nanna Bonde Thylstrup, Daniela Agostinho, Annie Ring, Catherine D’Ignazio and Kristin Veel (eds), *Uncertain Archives: Critical Keywords for Big Data*, Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 2021, 75–87. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Becoming a user on most of the pan.do/ra archives is very simple. On bak.ma, each visitor in the archive can have an account and become a member by clicking the sign-up button on the top of the main page. Without signing up, each visitor can play the videos and download them. In addition, visitors can access the collections, groups, collectives, and other files, e.g., photographs and pdf files on ‘Documents’. However, signing up on the main page is necessary to upload any type of data. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ulus S. Baker, ‘Normal Citizens Get Lost’, 1996, https://bak.ma/documents/YY. The original article (in Turkish), ‘Ölüm Orucu – Notlar’, Birikim 88, <https://birikimdergisi.com/dergiler/birikim/1/sayi-88-agustos-1996/2285/olum-orucu-notlar/3180> . [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. For example, the other two pan.do/ra archives that have political activist content – 858.ma: An Archive of Resistance and leftove.rs–do not allow their users to upload any files; they provide only viewing and downloading data. On 858.ma, a tutorial for visitors explains how to use the archive to search and play the videos. Users have the option to create personal lists by signing up, a feature not available on leftlove.rs. Also, users cannot create metadata or tag and annotate the data on these archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The Artıkişler video collective was formed by a group of documentary filmmakers, researchers, and video activists in Ankara in 2008 and was most active between 2008 and 2021. The collective tried to create collective production and distribution spaces in the fields of contemporary visual culture and arts, through collective working, exhibition, and screening in collaboration with other groups and collectives with similar orientations on controversial issues in Turkey’s recent social history (urban transformation, gentrification, forced migration, labor in urban space, archiving, collective political memory, etc.). Artıkişler’s videos were shown in many international biennials, festivals, events, and assemblies, received awards from international film festivals and organized solo exhibitions. Videos, texts, visual research projects, and exhibitions are accessible at http://artikisler.net/, https://vimeo.com/artikisler, and <https://bak.ma/> [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Sendika TV is a joint project of the news portal, <https://sendika.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The resistance started in December 2009 following the privatization of Tekel, the state monopoly of tobacco and alcoholic beverages and its 43 factories. The Turkish government announced that the factories would close, with the 12,000 workers redeployed to other public sector jobs on 11-month temporary contracts with pay cuts of up to 40% and reduced employment rights. This sparked industrial action, which began on 15 December, with the workers protesting against the cut of their monthly wage and the rescission of their right to severance pay. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn,* 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Alexandrina Buchanan and Michelle Bastian, ‘Activating the Archive: Rethinking the Role of Traditional Archives for Local Activist Projects’, *Archival Science* 15 (2015): 429–451. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Marika Cifor, ‘Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect Theory to Archival Discourse’, Archival Science 15 (2015): 1–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Cifor, ‘Affecting Relations’: 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Shaina Anand, ‘10 Thesis on the Archive’ in Özge Çelikaslan, Alper Şen and Pelin Tan (eds) *Autonomous Archiving*, Barcelona: dpr-barcelona, 2016, 79–97. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Duygu Doğan and Sidar Bayram, ‘Görsel Kayıtlar Hesap Sorabilir mi?: İnsan Hakları Arşivleri ve Geçiş Dönemi Adaleti’ in Türkiye’de Geçiş Dönemi Adaleti: Dönüşen Özneler, Yöntemler, Araçlar, Istanbul: Hakikat Adalet Hafıza Merkezi, 2020, 186–220. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Doğan and Bayram ‘Görsel Kayıtlar Hesap Sorabilir mi?’, 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Users of bak.ma can create public, private, or group collections and lists; and they can edit the data and metadata, add new titles, maps, documents, annotations, and tags, and link all the information. Once uploaded, each file has its own URL; moreover, each frame can receive its own URL through time-based annotations. Each video file and each frame can be edited, not only by inserting text, subtitles, or keywords but also by selecting various forms of visual timelines. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. The number of visitors (non-registered users) varies each month and year; as of now, it has exceeded 100,000. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)