

Video Activism and Activist Archiving: Collective Testimonies, Resilient Images and the Case of bak.ma

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Video activism is an essential tool of communication for global uprisings. Particularly in countries where media is tightly controlled by officials, video activist content allows for the visibility of marginalized struggles, instantly disseminating their demands, actions, and encounters with state violence. Moreover, the visibility of such realities contributes to shaping communal emotions and strengthening collective resistance. However, in the over-saturated web environment, these images lose their contextual significance amidst the constant sharing which demands our attention. Consequently, the need to organize these images and provide them with an identity within the framework of social struggles, acts of resistance, and the pursuit of justice they represent becomes increasingly crucial. In this context, digital and autonomous archiving initiatives do not make sense of the surplus of internet images but also act as a counter-practice that challenges the states' official archiving practices and its claim of monopoly over history. The digital archiving practices of activist groups wrest control away from established institutions, enabling the dissemination of alternative histories through images. As a result, these archives preserve the experiences of social groups ignored by official ideology and foster the proliferation of grassroots practices. Furthermore, the video activist archive emerges as an alternative infrastructure that supports the growth of community networks, activism, and protest cultures. This essay will centre on a study of bak.ma — the digital media archive of social movements that was created in Turkey following the massive urban protests in 2013 known as the Gezi Park protests. It seeks to examine how this archive constructs a national memory beyond state-approved knowledge and practices, achieved through decentralized and collective data collection that restores control of protest movements to the people. Additionally, this essay will also shed light on the challenges inherent in autonomous initiatives, encompassing issues like censorship, funding, labor and sustainability.

Keywords

Turkey
Video Activism
Digital Autonomous
Archives
Counter-memory
Bak.ma

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.54103/2036-461X/21893>

INTRODUCTION

People's Democratic Party Istanbul MP Sırrı Süreyya Önder threw himself in front of bulldozers to save the uprooting of trees in Istanbul's Gezi Park on May 28, 2013¹. Önder, who happens to also be a film director, is a significant voice of both political and artistic opposition in Turkey. The video served as a

1 To view video in question, please visit: <https://bak.ma/EZG/info>



catalyst for the widespread mobilization of protestors, resonating deeply with citizens who connected with the defiant act of reclaiming public space from the authorities. This widespread circulation of the video on digital platforms highlighted a critical aspect of media dynamics in Turkey—a realm predominantly controlled by the government, selectively disseminating narratives that uphold existing power structures. In this environment, social media emerged as a vital alternative for citizens seeking accurate information about the events unfolding in the city's metropolis, as traditional news outlets failed to convey the reality of the situation (Hacıyakupoglu and Zhang 2015; Tunç 2015).

While initially an environmental protest aimed at preserving the trees in Taksim's Gezi Park against urban renewal plans, the protests evolved into a nationwide political demonstration directed against growing authoritarianism in the country (Yörük and Yüksel 2014). The protests also reignited discussions related to Turkey's public memory (Özyürek 2007) and visual culture of social movements. Similar to other examples of global uprisings since the beginning of the 2010s, citizen journalism proliferated and became a vital tool for their coverage and documentation. Witnesses and participants in the protests shared their first-hand experiences through images.

Throughout the park occupation, numerous live broadcast stations were set up on-site. Platforms such as Çapul TV, Naber Medya, Videoccupy Collective and Ankara Eylem Vakti played host to politicians, NGO representatives, artists, and members of Occupy movements worldwide. Their goal was not only to explore ways to progress and sustain the spirit of the occupation but also to engage audiences and make them feel intimately connected to the ongoing events. Importantly, all broadcasts were streamed on the internet, eliminating the necessity for self-censorship. Moreover, filmmakers, journalists, and activist members of Videoccupy, who had previously harnessed the power of video and film for political purposes issued a call during the protests, urging everyone in the park to share their images in a collective pool, marking the beginning of bak.ma—the digital media archive established in the post-Gezi era with the aim of preserving the visual memory of the Gezi Park Protests. The priority at the time was rescuing the recordings and thus preserving the visuality of the protests.

Historically, in Turkey video activism has played a multifaceted role: it has acted as a platform for alternative media, empowered specific communities, and served as a vital documentation tool in response to mass media censorship. Askanus (2014) identifies these as the three key categories defining the purpose of video activism. Since the 1990s, video activist collectives have documented and disseminated recordings of the solidarity actions of minorities, left-wing, libertarian, and anarchist groups and their various resistances—strikes, occupations, demonstrations, protests, and commemorations. Yet, video activism is also linked to remembering, where the images are not only produced for the instant dissemination of information but also as part of a visual memory and telling (hi)stories of social causes (Berensel 2012, 7).

These fundamental aspects of video activism in Turkey also shaped the structure of bak.ma, a digital media archive of social movements. Many political

communities intersect with each other in this archiving work through video activist heritage that provided the ground in which bak.ma was seeded in 2013. In this context, video activism serves as a form of resistant recordkeeping practice, bearing witness to how the *archival turn in activism* (Pell 2020) has resonated in Turkey over the last two decades.

This archival effort, as an extension of the ongoing video activist initiatives and a communication strategy for them, addressed a significant gap in Turkey's historical preservation and archival landscape—the notable absence of a comprehensive record of protest narratives. By integrating videos into the practice of history writing as original documents, bak.ma challenges the concept of authority of who is authorized to keep the records of history for future generations. A new historicization is thus enabled by countering the hegemonic narrative produced by mainstream media, becoming in and of itself a political act that facilitates the re-creation of social visual memory (Çelikaşlan & Şen, 2017, 164).

In this essay, we begin by establishing a framework for understanding activist archiving. Through the lens of bak.ma, a case study, we delve into how such archives cultivate a social memory that transcends state-approved knowledge and practices. This is achieved through decentralized and collective data collection, empowering protest movements with regained control. Additionally, we explore the challenges inherent in activist initiatives, including censorship, accessibility, knowledge reproduction, activist labour, and sustainability. Our case study draws from the personal experiences of both authors: one as the co-founder of bak.ma and the other as an active member. Leveraging our engagement as scholars and activists in the field, we have collected empirical data to identify systemic issues within activist digital archiving. This methodological framework allows us to gain insights into the challenges faced and facilitates the sharing of experiences as a political act, initiating dialogue and fostering conversations about strategies for addressing these challenges. By employing our personal experiences and observations within an autoethnographic methodological approach, we create space for "a politics committed to creating space for dialogue and debate that instigates and shapes social change" (Jones 2005, 763).

APPROACHES TO ACTIVIST ARCHIVING

Among scholars and archivists alike, there has been an increasing interest in addressing absent and neglected social and political content in national archives, forms of exclusion from official memory, and the marginalization of certain minorities through archival practice. They have endeavoured to bring visibility to the archives of neglected communities (Cifor 2017; Sheffield 2019; Caswell 2021) whose right to archive they have highlighted (Prelinger 2021; Azoulay 2017). A body of research acknowledging that the archiving practices of neglected communities enhance theoretical knowledge has developed. Critical

archival studies have similarly promoted the notion of activist archiving and offered new perspectives to describe and transform the misrepresentation of marginalized communities within their own archives over the last decade (Flinn 2011; Cook 2012; McKemmish and Gilliland 2015; Caswell 2021; Cifor 2017; Rigney 2018).

Theorized by archive-related studies and research in the English-speaking West, community archives emerged through an interplay with activist politics that continues to challenge traditional institutional forms. These practices intend to empower communities, who take control over their own representations and historiographies. While these contributions are undeniably inspiring and necessary, they reveal a gap in the discourse. There is a notable absence of an archival approach that centres on the online, collaborative, activist archiving of audio-visual heritage from non-Western conflict-affected areas.

Building on the considerable history and experience of participatory community archiving in many European countries and North America, a new archival wave in conflict-affected areas outside the West has also been on the rise. The emergent archival wave has certain aims to sustain societal needs that include but are not limited to the preservation and circulation of archival material, provision of a social space, advocacy for human rights, and offering critical evidence of value to the quest for truth-seeking. For instance, archival initiatives in South Africa, South America, and the Middle East embrace vulnerable but influential content for such demands. Within their bounds of possibility, these initiatives utilize audio-visual tools and digital technology in their archival and other practices.

Archives in Turkey—both national and independent—are the target of state violence from time to time. The Turkish state has developed problematic relations even with its national archives, particularly with respect of its founding mass abuse, the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Sociologist Meltem Ahiska (2006) discusses the failures of archiving, censorship, and falsification in the national archives regarding certain politically charged subjects that have an important impact on historical truth.

Ahiska highlights archives “are not only the concerns of historians who are interested in recovering the past but also of political rulers who aim to frame the past for present purposes” (2006, 1). Consequently, these information systems privilege certain narratives while marginalizing others, their borders defined by state ideology. This reality had previously been highlighted by Michel Foucault (1969), who contends that archives mirror power structures of specific political, social, and historical contexts. Ahiska’s examination of Turkey’s missing archives reveals instances of censorship and archive falsification regarding politically charged subjects, significantly impacting historical truth. Thus, is only the state-approved knowledge that prevails, turning the writing of history oppressive and exclusionary, while the past is reshaped and read to preserve power relations to the present. As a result, social memory is also erased, with organized efforts to foster forgetfulness put into place by all the ideological apparatus of the state. Quoting historian Yosef H. Yerushalmi, Ahiska reminds us that “the opposite of forgetting is not just remembering, but justice” (2006,

28). Accordingly, we approach recordkeeping practices in conflict-affected areas as evocative initiatives that attempt to seek justice.

Activist archival initiatives offer a response to the state's monopolization of public memory and the political ramifications associated with such mnemonic power. Positioned as resistant infrastructures, they extend beyond institutional archiving models. Institutional archives, formal manifestations of archival possibilities, do not exhaust the full potential of what archives can be (Pad.ma 2010). Michelle Caswell (2021), advocating for the "joy of disruption", argues that archives, through interruption, can disrupt cycles of oppression. This realization prompts calls for a more activist role for archivists, challenging the presumed neutrality of archiving—a point emphasized by Robert Kaplan and Howard Zinn (1977). In this context, archives, while capable of serving as tools of hegemony, also hold the potential to become tools of resistance (Schwarz and Cook 2002, 13).

We contend that through activist archives, a distinct politics of the archive emerges—one critical in advancing social justice projects. While archives remain pivotal sites of knowledge and power, activist archives subvert their role as tools of domination and control. Moreover, such interventions wrest away control of the ideological hijacking of memory by the state, enabling groups to create a sense of their past, present, and future. The desire to reshape the politics of the archive has prompted a call for more collaborative and participatory forms of archiving, fuelled by the immense material arising from 21st century social movement protests. These approaches find support in the idea of the *commons*, emphasizing that access to knowledge should be equal for everyone.

Building on this transformative potential, archiving has become a conspicuous activist practice for less institutionalized and horizontally organized movements. These autonomous, activist archives disrupt dominant discourses, asserting the authority and rights to represent themselves. Susan Pell (2015) argues that these archives offer spaces of empowerment, self-determination, and collectivized knowledge production. They are crucial sites for understanding the evolving politics of the archive and contemplating the broader relationship between archives and politics. These archives share characteristics of functioning independently from institutional archives, being autonomously created, controlled, and maintained. They serve as primary material resources for marginalized groups to write their alternative and counter-histories, providing spaces for engagement in broader discourses. The archive provides images an identity, positioning them within a larger narrative of events unfolding, contextualizing the images in time and place.

BAK.MA: DON'T LOOK!

bak.ma provides a good example of how activist archiving becomes a form of resistance against historical erasure and manipulation, as a basic right to one's own history. Through its archival footage, bak.ma invites us to discuss

power structures, the disruption of social inequalities, and labour 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. Equally, the activities and collections of bak.ma bring into question the role of archiving in political activism and open up various ways of considering the socio-political and also material dimensions of collaborative archiving as a media practice.

The story of the emergence of the bak.ma digital media archive can be told through the different collectives that constituted it over the last decade. The idea of bak.ma was born out of struggle, emerging during the Gezi Park Protests, and it remains attached to the moment. Its history also reflects the transformation of Turkey's political and social conditions since 2013. During the Gezi Park Protests, the video activist collective *Videoccupy* was formed. Initially, there were twelve members, but many others—friends and colleagues, as well as video activists, filmmakers, artists, and designers—joined them to record the mass protests, police response, and daily life of occupation that sprang up in Gezi Park. This continued from the first days of the protest, up until the evening of June 15, when the police attacked the park, burning tents, and brutally removing protestors. Videoccupy aimed to reveal the peaceful intent of the protest movement, which had been misrepresented in the mainstream media.

Many protestors also recorded the uprising on their phones and handycams, and soon Videoccupy realized the need to collect these recordings to preserve the historical significance and the visual memory of the protests. Like the live broadcasts from Gezi, which disappeared after they were transmitted, there was a realization that the videos taken by protestors would soon be lost [Fig. 1].

After the end of the protests, *vidyokolektif*, a feminist video activist collective,



Fig. 1
Still from "Videoccupy"
(bak.ma 2014).
(Videoccupy is creating
visual memory of the
resistance).

was formed by the seven female members of Videoccupy. This group recorded further protests, edited videos, and worked on organizing the footage for an open-access archive. In June 2014, a publicly accessible portal was created called bak.ma. Employing a verbal sleight that uses a domain name (.ma) to give the negative instruction "Bakma" (Don't look) to express the paradoxical, reclaiming nature of its endeavour, bak.ma enables a closer look at the memory of the social resistance. The name came out of discussions about how activist video practice could disrupt the state and mainstream media's authoritative gaze. Through the footage collected in the archive, video activists served as witnesses to incidents of police violence and human rights violations, effectively transforming video into the public's watchful eye.

The initial upload of material to bak.ma was approximately 4TB of data, equivalent to over 800 hours of video footage. Mass uploading required several computers running Linux, and after significant effort, the content was uploaded and processed over the course of one year. This footage required additional archival work, including categorizing the collection, creating metadata, and entering annotations.

A group called *Artıkışler*, with support from some members of Videoccupy and vidyokolektif, undertook this archival work. Their open and participatory approach to archiving as well as the autonomous, and collective structure of bak.ma drew much attention. Since then, many people and groups have contributed to the archive's development, bringing in their own collections and video footage. Notably, a guerrilla TV network, Sendika TV (Syndicate TV), provided bak.ma with tapes, video CDs, and DVDs that had been rescued from police raids in the basement of their office in Ankara. Most of the footage documented the Tekel Workers struggle of 2009-2010 and other political events, including the May Day celebrations between 1977 and 2015 [Fig. 2]².

2 Tekel was a Turkish tobacco and alcoholic beverage company. In December 2009, the Turkish government declared the closure of 12 Tekel factories, in line with their ongoing privatization policies that were ongoing since 2002. Approximately 10,000 workers faced redeployment into other public sector positions under temporary contracts, pay cuts and diminished employment rights. This announcement triggered industrial action by the workers against the implementation of insecure employment conditions within the public sector. The workers argued that the changes in their employment would significantly reduce their monthly wages and eliminate severance pay and, to show their discontent against the government's privatization and employment policies, around 12,000 workers established resistance tents in Ankara's Abdi İpekçi Park. The resistance lasted 78 days and was documented by video activists, journalists and filmmakers. The video recordings of the resistance were brought together on bak.ma under the category of Tekel. For the May Day celebrations in 1977, an estimated half a million people gathered in Taksim Square. During speeches, gunshots were fired, causing chaos and turmoil. At the same time, armoured police vehicles entered the area, crushing and killing many. As the crowd attempted to leave the square down the long, steep Kazancı street, a truck positioned at the top blocked their path, leading to a stampede and many lost their lives due to the crushing. 41 people lost their lives, while 136 were seriously hurt. This day has come to be known as Bloody May Day. None of the perpetrators were caught and brought to justice. May Day celebrations have been banned in Taksim Square except for the year 1978 and the three-year period from 2010

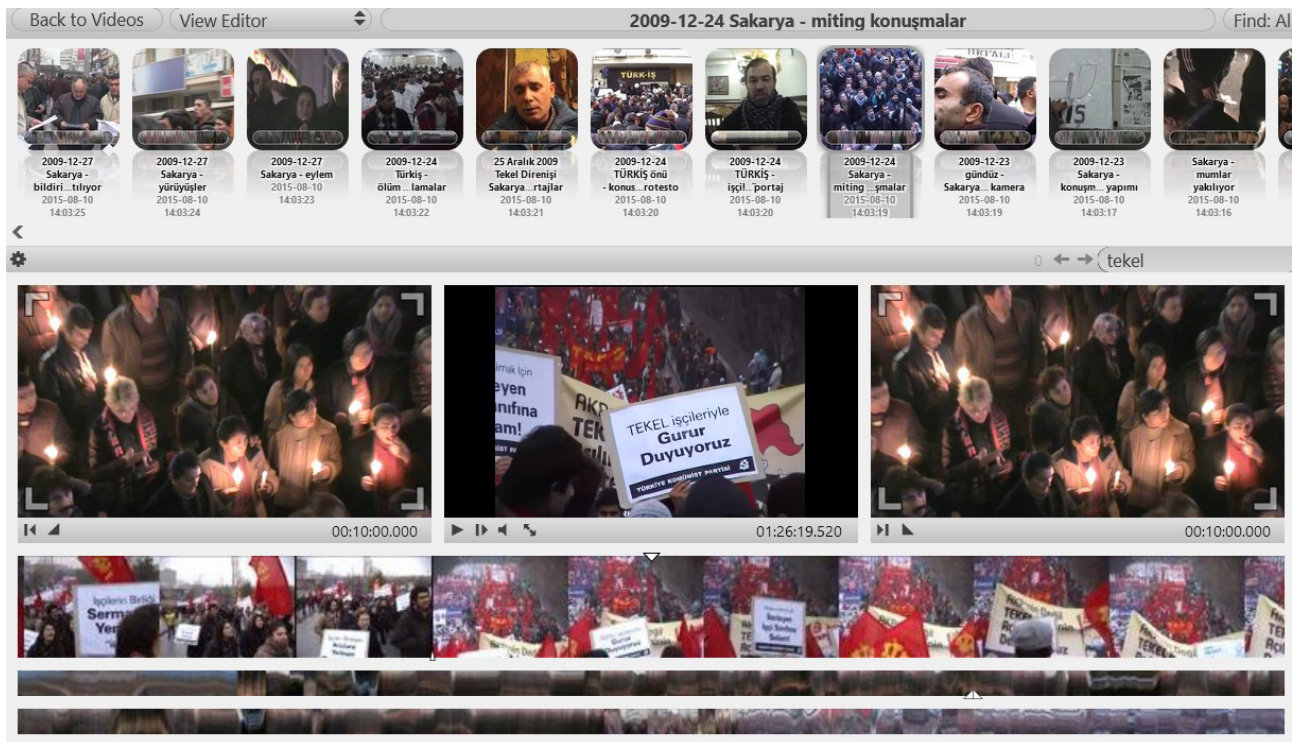


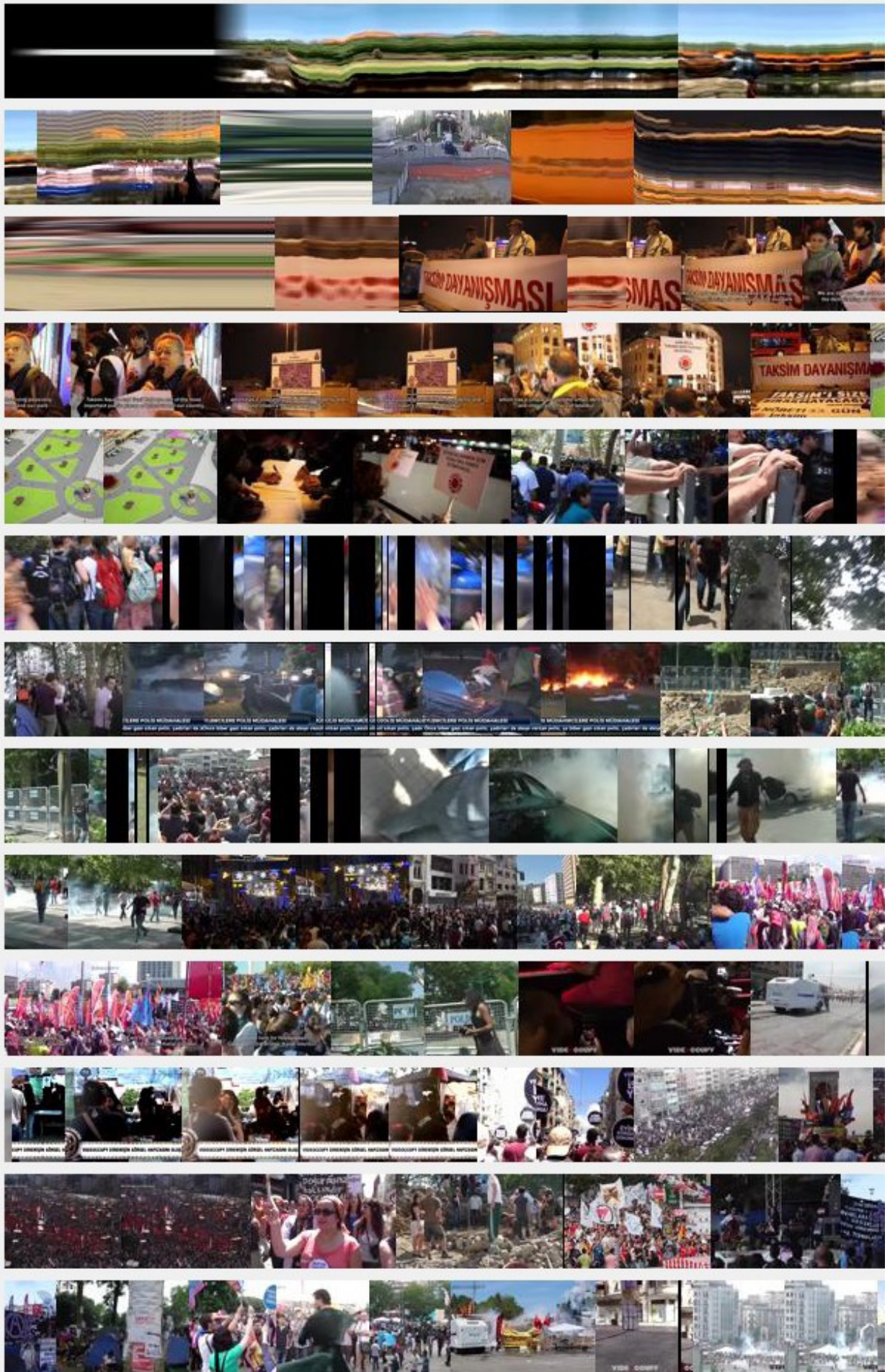
Fig. 2
Still from the video collection "Tekel" (bak.ma 2015).

At the base of bak.ma is a decentralized digital structure that enables a collaborative and autonomous archiving process. It employs the software program *Pan.do/ra*, a free, open-source media archive platform that allows to manage large, decentralized collections of videos, to collaboratively create metadata and time-based annotations. This makes it possible to sort the videos by date, group them in categories, tag them based on events, attribute keywords based on the details of the event, and establish the time of day and location of the event. This approach aligns with the platform's commitment to fostering a collaborative engagement and open environment. In that sense, bak.ma embodies what has been called a "living archive" (Hogan 2012) because it invites audiences to be active participants and collaborators in the archive, relinquishing control of collection and expanding user autonomy. As such this kind of engagement with data, prevents "any one agent from imposing narrative and ideological closure upon the data" (Haskins, 2007, 406).

Users of bak.ma are automatically granted the permission to download and upload static files and moving images; they 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 [Fig. 3].

Fig. 3 [next page]
Timeline view from the video collection "Gezi" (bak.ma 2014).

to 2012. Every year, activists try to enter the Square but are faced with harsh police brutality and detention.



The videos on bak.ma have mostly been categorized, sorted, and described collaboratively by titles, keywords, tags, short or long texts, and/or annotations. Cataloguing and annotating the digital objects are essential parts of the work and also a creative and transformative part of activist archiving in which the relational process in the archive develops. Because the archivist assigns the value of the material in this way, Brunow suggests understanding cataloguing—in the context of analogue film archives—“not as a neutral, descriptive activity, but as a performative act of power.” (2018, 180). Thus, the collaborative nature of this process is an important aspect of activist archives, cultural memory and its polyvocality can be influenced by creating multiple narratives and images in the process of annotations. Likewise, on bak.ma, titles, tags, keywords, and descriptions are informative and have a strong effect on the perception of the content. The lists of these items create new political compositions by *folksonomy* which is described as “a type of distributed classification system” by Marieke Guy and Emma Tonkin (2006). A group of individuals, mainly users, create this system by tagging online items, images, videos, bookmarks, and text [Fig. 4].

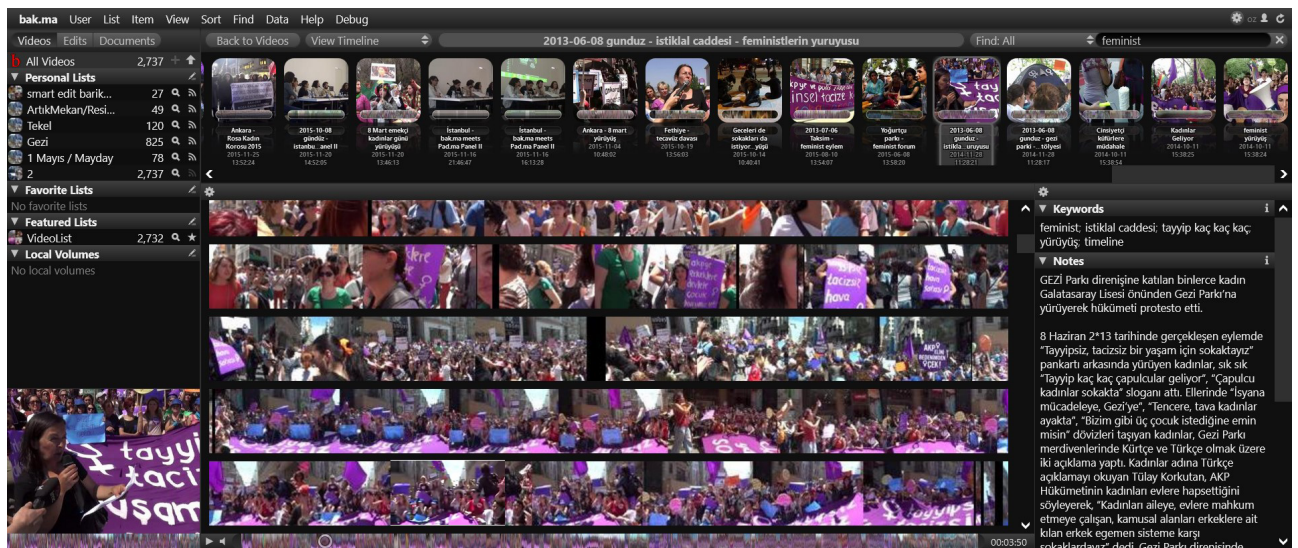
The digital objects then have descriptions, information, keywords, and tags attached. This distinctive structural approach reflects bak.ma’s commitment to inclusivity, collaboration, and preserving the authenticity and context of the materials within its digital repository. Archival content takes precedence in this practice, which, for bak.ma, primarily refers to the video collections.

The bak.ma video collections consist of audio-visual media of different formats and lengths but mostly digital raw footage of activist recordings, feature documentaries, and short films. As an ever-expanding archive, bak.ma has more than 50 categories that refer to key subject areas. The content of the online archive includes and involves visual and textual data of social movements such as the Gezi Park Protests, TEKEL workers’ resistance, May Day marches and various other protests from 1977 until today, including specific demonstrations, events, meetings, talks by feminist and queer groups, urban rights activists, and ecological initiatives. The archive also includes testimonies, evidence and recordings of the curfews, blockades, and destruction in Kurdish towns by the Turkish state from different periods between the 1990s until today.

The sizes of these collections change over time. bak.ma is also an archive in progress; classification and annotation of the collections are ongoing operations.

Fig. 4
Main page, excerpt from
screenshot of the menu
(bak.ma 2014).

Date	#	Categories	#	Tags	#	Keywords	#	Groups and Collectives	#
2004	108	Gen Dönüşüm İşçileri...	5	arşiv	12	Gezi	21	Tekel İşçileri / Tekel...	80
2013-06-11	68	Gezi	826	eylem	11	Hierarchy	21	Videoccupy	63
2013-06-13	67	Göç Migration	27	interviews	11	InterflugsStructure	21	Anonymous	60
2013-06-12	64	Göçmen Hakları	8	tahribat	11	learning	21	DISK	55
2013	63	Görsel Düşünme	1	işçi	10	Question	20	Seyri Sokak	52
2013-06-04	63	Gründung	3	mayın	10	Accessibility	19	Surplus of Melbou...	26
2013-06-02	61	Hamburg G20	4	panel	10	EmploymentSelecti...	19	IHD	24
2013-06-15	46	Hayata Dönüş Ope...	2	seçim	10	GoodMoment	19	Başak Kültür ve Sa...	21
2018	46	Hayvan Hakları	2	Sur	10	PoliticalAgenda	19	vidyokolektif	20
2013-05-31	35	HDP	9	bostan	9	Videozeitung Intro	19	Taksim Dayanışması	18
2013-06-07	35	Hewsel	3	cizre	9	archive	18	HDP	16
2013-06-08	33	Interflugs	17	çatışma	9	Autonomy	18	bak.ma	13
2014	30	Interflugs Archive	60	çöp toplayıcıları	9	Feminism	18	KozaVisual	13
2010	27	İstanbul'un Artığı	2	feminist	9	Institutionalisation	18	Kaos GL	12
2013-06-09	27	kadın hareketi	21	futbol	9	Kurzfilm	18	Dev-Lis	11



From the initial goals of preservation, now bak.ma has expanded in scope and location, including social movements from various parts of the world related to the topics of migration, postcolonialism, antiracism, LGBTI+, and feminism [Fig. 5].

The archive collective diligently gathers visual recordings and documents produced by media activists, groups, and individuals involved in these struggles. Beyond videos, bak.ma also provides a collection of texts focusing on topics such as autonomous archiving, media archiving, video activism, and social movements—available for free download. However, preservation, accessibility and maintenance remain the key focus of the archive, rather than its improvement, because these are the basic needs required for the fundamental constitution of the archive.

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES IN ACTIVIST ARCHIVING

Activist archiving grapples with a host of structural challenges that impede its sustainability. These challenges encompass labour and financial limitations, alongside safety risks such as detention and censorship.

Activist communities engaged in archival efforts are deemed both economically and politically vulnerable, and the longevity of collectives is precarious, dissipating when the initial excitement wanes. The necessity for a common space, juxtaposed with the isolating nature of individual computer-based efforts, adds to the complexity. The absence of a formal or institutional structure in bak.ma provides a non-hierarchical, autonomous working environment and an uncensored, free content space. However, as is common in any social organization, this setup introduces a precarious and uncertain situation in terms of sustainability. The level and continuity of labour dedicated to bak.ma are naturally influenced by personal, economic, and political factors in the lives of the volunteers. Moreover, the lack of sustainable financial support hinders

Fig. 5
Timeline view, excerpt from screenshot of the video file “feminist march on Istiklal Avenue” (bak.ma 2014).

the active organization and expansion of the archive's content. Instead, the content remains confined to areas of interest dictated by individual encounters and networks.

The absence of sustainable financial support not only jeopardizes the systematic development of the archive's content but also restricts it to more niche areas driven by personal interests and connections. The issue of content and information management is also related to what to include and exclude in the age of pervasive digital media. The lack of curatorship may lead to the overwhelming challenge of managing excessive content. Since autonomous archiving demands significant virtual space and specialized IT skills, the financing of both the platform and the labour behind it becomes essential for the overall output of the material in the context of an archive.

Security concerns further exacerbate the fragility of autonomous archives; the personal collections of video activists, documentary filmmakers and journalists recording social movements and struggles in Turkey have long been under threat. Two recent cases can be given as examples: Oktay İnce and Sibel Tekin faced the challenge of safeguarding hard drives in the face of potential risks. Video activist Oktay İnce's house was raided on October 18, 2018. The police confiscated his archival material and digital devices contained all of his output in the last 20 years. İnce demanded the return of his archive by protesting on a day-to-day basis in various public spaces in Izmir and Ankara. In his press statements, which were cut short by his detention by the police, he has stated:

I spent a large part of my life on video activism and making documentaries on social struggles in Turkey. They (the police) confiscated the visual archive of social struggles in Turkey from the last 20 years, the documentary works, all of the raw footage waiting to be edited, and our labor. There is nothing that constitutes a crime in these archives and material; they are breaking the law themselves by taking the original material, instead of copies. My concern is not about the court case they are planning to file. What worries me is that the archive of social struggles in Turkey over the last 20 years will be destroyed while in police custody. (Bianet 2019)

Fellow video activist and documentary filmmaker Sibel Tekin on her part was arrested on December 17, 2022, following a raid on her house where her digital archival material, cameras, computer and some books were confiscated by the police. She has documented rights violations throughout her work and today is being punished for increasing their visibility. While she is being charged with membership to a terrorist organization, there is no organization listed in her indictment, demonstrating how arbitrary the judicial system in Turkey has become. She was released two months later, on judicial control measures. bak.ma sees it as one of its responsibilities to protect these digital collections; however, the delicate balance between maintaining the spirit of dissemination and negotiating the associated risks raises questions about the fate of archives as enduring projects.

On the other hand, the government in Turkey remains unaware and seemingly disinterested in online niche spaces like bak.ma. The site has not been blocked in Turkey as of yet, although surveillance mechanisms are well in place for alternative channels like Twitter and YouTube, which are subject to censorship when there is content deemed “politically controversial in nature” (Askanius 2015, 465). Moreover, while such platforms have been deemed revolutionary and democratizing information, consolidate action into video production and consumption of the individual, rather than into a community (ibid.) So, on the one hand, being niche does permit for some security from outright internet blocking, on the other hand, the dissemination of the information on bak.ma remains limited. Thus, a constant negotiation of risks becomes part of the structural reality of such initiatives.

CONCLUSION

While authoritarianism has been rising and violent conflicts have expanded globally over the last quarter-century, activist media practices have been playing a critical role in responding to the restriction of freedom and rights. In this context, bak.ma emerges as an embodiment of the need for collaborative archiving practices in Turkey, interwoven into the fabric of ongoing struggles for justice, freedom of speech, and access to knowledge.

“The Contemporary and World History” textbook distributed in the Turkish public education system demonstrates now more than ever the importance of bak.ma as a multivocal resource on the Gezi Park Protests. Instead of a politics of erasure, the textbook’s narrative has manipulated the events in the park and the intentions of the protestors, framing them not as a form of civil activism and as a democratic right to protest, but rather a rebellion concocted by foreign capitalist forces, aiming to topple down the Justice and Development Party’s economic and democratic policies—their environmental motivations depicted as an excuse for such anti-government demonstrations (Alemdar and Keleş 2019, 244–5). This rewriting of history has been a tool to justify the conviction of 16 peace activists to sentences ranging from life imprisonment to 18 years behind bars for attempting to overthrow the government. The Gezi Trial demonstrates the dual impact of authoritative retelling: distorting the historical record and legitimizing repressive actions. This intentional rewriting not only perpetuates a skewed understanding of the Gezi Park Protests but also casts a shadow over the broader public memory, fostering a narrative that undermines the very democratic principles the protests sought to uphold.

In contrast, bak.ma transcends the conventional bounds of archival practices, not merely serving as a repository of historical documentation but actively creating possibilities of a living memory of the social movements through

the collectivization of memory. As the Gezi Trial³ exemplifies the potential consequences of rewriting history to serve political ends, bak.ma serves as a counter force that actively shapes a narrative of resistance, resilience, and enduring social change. This living memory is one that evolves, adapts, and remains relevant to the ongoing struggles for justice. It offers a counterpoint to the forces of authoritarianism, enabling the preservation and dissemination of narratives that challenge the status quo. In doing so, it operates as a dynamic space of empowerment, instigating a paradigm shift in the politics of the archive. Beyond mere preservation, bak.ma becomes a catalyst for a more profound engagement with the past—one that resists erasure and actively shapes the contours of collective memory, as memory does not have a homogenous subject (Ahiska 2006, 11). As such, bak.ma is not merely an archive; it is a resilient response to the challenges of the present and an active force for envisioning a more just and liberated future. By grounding itself in the principles of collaboration, empowerment, and accessibility, bak.ma illustrates how collective memory can be harnessed to shape a narrative of resistance, resilience, and enduring social change.

3 Businessman and philanthropist Osman Kavala was imprisoned on October 18, 2017. He was sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment on April 25, 2022, for attempting to overthrow the government by force by allegedly orchestrating the Gezi Park Protests. His co-defendants Mücella Yapıcı, Çiğdem Mater, Ali Hakan Altınay, Mine Özerden, Tayfun Kahraman, Can Atalay and Yiğit Ali Emekçi were sentenced to 18 years in prison and arrested for aiding the attempt to overthrow the government. On September 18, 2023, another court overturned the 18-year prison sentences given to Ali Hakan Altınay, Yiğit Ali Emekçi and Mücella Yapıcı and decided to release Mücella Yapıcı and Ali Hakan Altınay on condition of judicial control. The trial has been characterized as “a mockery of justice” by Human Rights Watch, emphasizing being a critic of Erdoğan’s government as the “number one form of political persecution in Turkey today” (Human Rights Watch 2023).

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