

Hacker or Google's Inside Job? In Brazil Controversial Orkut Pages Disappear

Contributed by Elma Lia Nascimento
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Some Brazilians are accusing Google of suppressing freedom of expression in the still of the night, after at least 10 mega communities of their Orkut social network disappeared in the wee hours of Saturday, September 23.

Most of these disappeared groups were political communities and opposed the reelection of president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. The largest of them, "Fora Lula 2006" (Out Lula 2006) had over 180,000 members.

Others, however, see the disappearance of the pages as the work of hackers in a very inspired and busy weekend. Against the hacker's job theory is the fact that no one has stepped up to claim authorship of the defacing.

For adman Fernando Nascimento, 21, the creator of the Fora Lula 2006 community the suppression of his page was expected: "This was an attack against the freedom of expression. I knew this might happen, so it wasn't a big surprise when it really occurred."

Nascimento has already restarted his community from scratch since all members and messages have been lost. Sunday afternoon, there were already more than 3,500 members and close to 400 postings.

He reopened the community with the same name and a picture of the young Lula when he was arrested by the military in the 1960s. On the plate hanging from Lula's neck instead of the date the police mug has the phrase: "Lula There... Far Way from Government."

"We're back," Nascimento writes in a short introductory note. "We won't shut up in face of criminals who tear down Brazil's constitution and spit on democracy."

After his initial reaction, the founder of the "Fora Lula 2006" concluded that his community had not been deleted by Google in response to the Brazilian Federal Police, but in reaction to other members of the community who denounced his and other sites as responsible for spreading false or defamatory information.

In retaliation he directed the members of the community to accuse other communities of doing the same: "Orkut will take care of deleting the community. There is a little detail though: in order for them to take action at least 20 reports are necessary, otherwise they won't do a thing..."

"Let's counterattack and take off the air all the communities pro-corruption-Lulist-imbecile-retarded-da-Silva while there is time before the elections." And he goes on citing several communities to be targeted including one called "Viva Lula" with over 25,000 members and "We Vote Lula" with more than 60,000 adherents.

Other erased communities have also started the rebuilding. Two of them were not even political or controversial: they dealt with Kaiser and Skol, two beer brands.

At least two communities dedicated to YouTube, one of them with 62,000 members were also erased. Another one was dedicated to Olavo de Carvalho, a right-wing philosopher, who has inspired dozens of communities pro and against him.

"We are in favor of the death penalty," "Death penalty, now!", and "Good criminal is dead criminal" have all taken a leave of absence too from Orkut.