

Actress expected to file suit over nude images on internet

By Greg Miller=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

Cast in roles they never envisioned, let alone approved, many of Hollywood's top celebrities are increasingly finding that they are the star attractions on thousands of Internet sex sites.

Hoping to bring the curtain down on such sites, "Melrose Place" star Alyssa Milano is expected to file two lawsuits Tuesday against several online companies accused of selling nude pictures of her and dozens of other stars over the Internet.

The suits by the television actress would be the first of their kind in a simmering conflict between stars dismayed by their lack of control over their online images and legions of entrepreneurs who are raking in millions of dollars by selling digitized glimpses of celebrity skin, including many pictures that are fakes.

The pending lawsuits accuse companies in Los Angeles, Minnesota and Canada of copyright, privacy and other violations, and aim to force them to pull the plug on their various sites. Mitchell Kamarck, a Beverly Hills attorney who represents Milano, said he hopes the lawsuits also ignite a broader attack by Hollywood against sex sites.

"This is the tip of the iceberg," Kamarck said. "Celebrities are realizing for the first time that the Net is a dangerous force if it's not corralled."

But taming the Internet is always a thorny legal issue, as Congress learned last year when its attempt to outlaw indecency in cyberspace was overturned on First Amendment grounds.

It's also unclear if the Internet can actually be corralled. After all, even if Milano's suits shutter a handful of sites, there are countless others that will go about their X-rated business as usual, with new online peep shows popping up every day.

"I don't think you can stamp it out," said Anthony Lupo, a Washington, D.C. attorney and expert on Internet legal issues. "The law may be in Hollywood's favor, but there's enormous demand for these pictures and it's so easy to do."

Typing the name of almost any star into an Internet search engine yields numerous skin sites. Add the word "nude" to the query and the list of matches becomes an avalanche.

Some of the pictures are stills taken from movies in which the stars have appeared nude. Others are paparazzi shots of celebrities caught off-guard. But many of the pictures are outright fakes in which software has been used to paste a star's face on a nude body, sometimes in sexually graphic positions.

To those who have followed this issue, it's no surprise that the first lawsuits are being brought by Milano, a 25-year-old actress best known for her childhood role on the 1980s sitcom "Who's the Boss."

Her mother, Lin Milano, has led

Japan not pumped up by self-service gas stations

By Valerie Reitman=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

TOKYO — When Sanae Nakano pulled into her usual gas station the other day, she was handed a leaflet explaining the ABCs of filling the tank, starting with "Park the car in an open space."

Nakano wasn't pleased to learn that her neighborhood General Oil station in Yokohama had become one of Japan's self-serve-gas guinea pigs.

"I'm afraid I'll set the place on fire," Nakano confided, as an attendant coaching virgin gas-pumpers held the nozzle while she and her two young children huddled around the pump. "It's a lot of trouble. You didn't have to get out of the car before."

Though self-serve stations have been part of the U.S. landscape for two decades — and most Americans

something of a crusade against celebrity sex sites, and even started a small company called CyberTrackers that scans the Internet on behalf of a handful of clients, looking for illicit images and firing off electronic warnings to offending sites.

Some of the Milano images are taken from a film in which she appeared nude, Kamarck said, but others are fakes.

Kamarck said Milano could have targeted any number of companies, but selected those named in her suits because they appear to have profited significantly from their activities and have ignored repeated requests to remove pictures from their sites.

At least one defendant, John F. Lindgren, registered owner of nudecelebrity.com in Minnesota, acknowledged receiving complaints from Milano, but said he ignored them and was waiting for "something really serious."

Asked how he would respond to a suit, Lindgren, 21, he said he would simply take down the Milano pictures but seek to keep running a business that he claims is bringing in more than \$10,000 a month.

Other defendants — including Paul Anand of British Columbia and Alexander Poparic of Los Angeles — could not be reached for comment. The pending suits are expected to seek unspecified damages.

Celebrity skin sites occupy a small but growing corner of the vast online adult industry, which Forrester Research expects to surpass \$185 million this year.

Most sites function like virtual strip joints, charging entrance fees to see the main attractions. Others, including one targeted in Milano's suit, sell CD-ROM collections of thousands of celebrity nude photos.

Established venues can make up to \$80,000 a month, according to executives at Cybernet Ventures, a Los Angeles company that handles credit-card transactions and age verification for thousands of adult sites.

Some sex-site operators argue that it's hypocritical for celebrities to bemoan a kind of attention they often seem to seek by appearing nude in films and having plastic surgery.

But the problem also confronts celebrities who have never appeared nude and have spent their careers cultivating a wholesome image, including Dawn Wells, who played the squeaky-clean Mary Ann on the "Gilligan's Island" television series.

Last month, she learned of a site that was posting a picture of the "Gilligan's Island" cast in which the images of Mary Ann and Ginger were digitally undressed. Wells' attorney sent an angry letter and got the picture removed, but Wells said she hardly feels victorious.

"I think it's alarming," Wells said. "It just violates my rights, my privacy. The most frightening thing about it is that I don't think you can control it."

now fill their own tanks — Japanese drivers could do so only beginning April 1.

Despite a lot of hoopla in Japan, however, self-serve appears to be off to a slow start. Daunted by the high cost of equipment conversion, extensive safety requirements and thin profit-margin forecasts, only a handful of stations nationwide have gone the do-it-yourself route.

And those that have made the switch are counting on a rather curious draw to lure new customers: shame. Most customers feel too embarrassed to order anything less than a full tank in return for full service. In Japan, where gas sells for double what it costs in the United States, that can be a pricey proposition.

So far, there's been little monetary incentive to entice drivers to prime the pumps themselves. At least

Bishop who led human rights study is murdered

By Juanita Darling=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

GUATEMALA CITY — The Roman Catholic bishop who supervised a recently published study of human rights abuses committed here in three decades of a U.S.-backed conflict has been brutally murdered — a reminder of the bloody violence that haunts this nation from its decades of civil war.

An assailant crushed the skull of Bishop Jose Juan Gerardi with a concrete block as the cleric, returning from dinner with his sister, entered his house at 11 p.m. Sunday, church officials said. The 75-year-old coordinator of the Guatemalan Archbishop's Office of Human Rights was hit 14 times on the back of the head and the face. Nothing was stolen.

A statement released Monday by the independent human rights office gave the government 72 hours to clear up the crime, because "if impunity is allowed to extend to this case, the cost for Guatemala will be high."

Police have found a witness and are looking for a suspect based on a composite drawing. Attorney General Hugo Perez Aguilera has called this crime "a vile murder."

not while full-service coddling is available down the street for, at most, dimes more per tank. Such a small premium is hardly an indulgence in an expensive country with an excellent public transit system, where cars are more ornament than utility.

"They just make my windshield squeaky clean and wash my tires so they look brand new," gushed Rei Yaegashi, 25, as three attendants yelling "Irashaimase!" — "Welcome!" — ushered him into a full-service station in Tokyo, filled his tank, washed his windows, dumped his ashtray and checked his oil, transmission fluid and battery. "I don't think most Japanese will want to do it themselves, especially girls," he said.

As Yaegashi pulled away, an attendant jumped into a busy street to halt oncoming traffic and directed him out of the lot — all part of the full-serve routine here. Explained station manager Yasunori Kikuchi, "I don't think consumers can pull in, pump gas and leave the station without bumping into each other or making a mess in a small place like this."

Indeed, even the oil companies that have ventured into the self-serve business are skeptical of its viability. Cosmo Oil, the third-largest gas station operator in Japan with 6,573 stations, has opened just one self-serve stand and plans only a dozen in the next year. Nippon Oil, the largest with 9,700 stations, has launched just two, including one joint venture with a McDonald's restaurant in Kobe. (The idea is to entice customers pulling out of the station to drive directly into the adjacent hamburger stand.)

General Oil, a joint venture between Exxon Corp. and several Japanese companies that has 2,400 stations, initially planned 20 self-serve stations but cut back to four.

"We didn't think the returns would be so quick," said Hidenobu Fujiyama, General Oil's managing director, who was on hand during the launch of the self-serve station in Yokohama.

Converting from full-serve to self-serve involves a \$200,000 investment, he said, since Japan mandates far more equipment than the U.S. requires. Devices that automatically douse flames at the pump and detect when diesel fuel is mistakenly pumped into an unleaded tank are mandatory. Video cameras must be trained on each pump to relay images to a monitor at the cashier stand. And an attendant equipped to deal with hazardous materials must be on duty at all times.

Nevertheless, Fujiyama figures self-serve cuts labor costs in half — and labor expenses constitute half of total operating costs. A union representing workers has complained about possible staff reductions, although the

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan condemned the killing "in the strongest terms." The United States said it deplored the "senseless act of violence" and called on Guatemala to begin a full investigation. And the Catholic Bishops' International Policy Committee called the murder a "terrible shock" and "despicable crime."

Authorities in this crime-riven nation have not stated a motive for this murder. But for those who worked with Gerardi, the reason was clear. "This was a blow against the peace process," said Guatemalan human rights activist Hellen Mack. "For them to have killed a bishop — which they did not even dare to do during the war — shows how far (some people) are willing to go to stop the peace process."

Gerardi initiated and directed the Roman Catholic Church's Historical Memory Recovery project, a three-year study of human rights abuses committed in the civil war that ended with a peace agreement in December 1996. Released Friday, the 1,400-page study, "Never Again," compiled 6,500 interviews, many in 15 Mayan languages.

It was the first attempt to document atrocities committed in the 36-

year conflict between Communist guerrillas and the government, which except for the last years of the war was made up of U.S.-backed military dictators.

The church report agreed with many scholars that although the war began in the early 1960s, it had roots in the 1954 CIA-backed coup that deposed democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz.

The rebellion was supported by many of the poor in the Mayan highlands. Military dictators initiated a scorched-earth policy in the early 1980s, killing thousands of Indian peasants and driving thousands more from their homes to eliminate the rebels' sources of supplies.

Among the legacies of this war and similar conflicts in the region was the creation of a huge refugee population in Southern California — an estimated 250,000 Salvadorans and Guatemalans.

During the war, government censorship prevented investigations into more than 400 massacres committed by insurgents, the armed forces and private armies sympathetic to them. Since the conflict ended, civilian groups have increasingly demanded accountability for human rights

Birthrates declining in much of Africa

By Stephen Buckley=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

NAIROBI, Kenya — Margaret Muthoni is a single mother with two children. She makes \$52 a month selling vegetables. Rent and food alone usually swallow her income. Her mother pays for her children's schooling.

Those distressing facts have led Muthoni to a simple decision: No more children.

"I can't afford another child," Muthoni, 31, said. "It's difficult to raise the two I have now. Two are enough for me."

Improved education among women, urbanization and stronger government programs have helped reduce fertility rates in numerous African countries over the past two decades. Fear of child mortality also has been an especially potent force in compelling women to bear fewer offspring and to have them further apart.

Yet, today, population experts say that economic pressures have become at least as important as health issues in persuading Africans to have fewer children.

The trend signals a sea change in how Africans think of their families. No longer are children necessarily thought of as a source of wealth in and of themselves. For years, Africans had large families no matter how poor they were; now, those who have children they cannot afford are attacked as irresponsible.

"A big family used to be respected," said John Kekovole, a senior fellow with the African Population Policy Research Center. "If you had a big family, you got prestige. Now, if you have a lot of children and can't take care of them, what you get is blame."

Economics has played an especially key role in countries such as Kenya, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Ghana and parts of Nigeria — all nations burdened by stagnant or shrinking per capita income, high inflation and increased costs of basic services, such as education. In Zimbabwe, fertility rates fell from 7.1 children per woman of child-bearing age to 4.4 between 1985 and 1996, while the gross domestic product dropped from \$640 per capita in 1985 to \$540 in 1995, according to the World Bank. Likewise, here in Kenya the fertility rate dropped from 8 to 5.4 during the 1985-1996 period as the economy declined. Zambia's fertility rate dropped from 7.4 to 6.5.

In one study in Nigeria, two-thirds of those polled cited economic

abuses committed by all sides.

Currently, 25 soldiers are on trial for a massacre at Xaman in 1995, the first time members of the military have been tried for mass murders committed during the conflict.

The church report found that 200,000 people died or disappeared during the war, a figure 60,000 higher than previous estimates. The report also stated that 90 percent of those killed were unarmed civilians; 75 percent of the victims were Mayan Indians. The guerrillas of Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity committed 10 percent of the atrocities and the rest were the fault of the armed forces and armed groups that backed them, the report found.

During most of the war, Gerardi was bishop of Verapaz, and, later, Quiche. Both are predominantly Mayan provinces. He was an outspoken advocate of human rights, publicly denouncing the murders of priests and lay workers. He was forced into exile in Costa Rica from 1980 to 1984. He returned to Guatemala as auxiliary bishop to the Archbishop of Guatemala City and founded the human rights office.

hardship as the primary reason for using contraception and delaying marriage.

The phenomenon has baffled population experts. Historically, falling fertility rates accompany long-term economic success, as in East Asia and in African countries such as Botswana and Mauritius.

"It's really a total reversal of how we usually think of reducing fertility rates," said Ayo Ajayi, regional director of the Population Council, a research organization.

Nevertheless, many analysts say the trend is here to stay. Population experts say that a drop in fertility rates of 10 percent or more indicates what they call an "irreversible fertility transition," meaning that fertility rates should only continue to decline.

African families historically have been large for traditional, political and economic reasons.

The tremendous importance of ancestry meant that women who could bear few or no children suffered the taint of moral failing unequalled in their societies.

Africans also believed large families led to economic strength. Rural families needed children to help on their farms, theoretically increasing crop production and improving care of livestock. Urbanites believed that large families could more easily build business monopolies and gain influence with government officials.

At the same time, politicians refrained from promoting birth control for fear of being accused of betraying African ways for the unfamiliar and allegedly evil traditions of the West.

For years, Kenya was speeding toward a population disaster. Women bore an average of eight children, and the population was exploding by 4 percent annually — the highest rate in the world.

Then, during the 1980s, Kenya slipped into what has become a chronic economic crisis. Corruption and government mismanagement have brought on huge budget deficits, leading to persistent inflation. Drought and flooding have repeatedly demolished crops. Foreign investment has dropped off.

The moribund economy has driven unemployment and underemployment to historic post-independence levels. Unemployment among males ages 15 to 19 tops 60 percent. Many of the country's best minds have left. Meanwhile, per capita income has dipped from \$370 a year to \$270.