

Television: Magic or Monster?

At its best television is an educator, a medium that can teach us about the rest of the world with moving pictures, words and music. At its worst, it replaces the viewers identity and culture with images of American style materialism and violence. With international networks such as CNN reaching all corners of the planet, Gemini News Service looks at how some African countries are finding their own creative responses.

Ronald Watts writes from Harare

RESEARCH laboratory worker Agnes Runganga, is one of a growing number of mothers in Zimbabwe who are concerned about the negative effects of television on her children. She refuses to have a TV set in her house.

"Zimbabwean children who watch television regularly think they are Americans" she says. Countless other parents across the world feel the same. She fears children's lives are being ruined by television.

When television first went on the air from London in 1936 it was considered a novelty and something to be welcomed. The dangerous effects on local culture and the raising of people's expectations to unrealistic levels were seen only later.

Julius Nyerere, when he was president of Tanzania, felt that his country could not afford to have television and needed the money for other "social priorities".

Sri Lanka held out against having a television service until the 1970s. In the 1980s the

minister responsible for broadcasting was much influenced by what he saw of American television while in a hospital bed. Television, he said, "is the deadliest instrument to create a non-thinking generation of people, gun happy and brought up on mayhem and murder."

Similar criticism was voiced recently by popular BBC newscaster Martyn Lewis. While on a lecture tour in the United States he said that television was subjecting viewers to "a relentless culture of negativity." He was particularly critical of television news editors. He wanted a shift to more good news of between 10 and 15 per cent per year.

With the introduction of World Service Television the BBC is now in the global firing line for television criticism.

Subscribers are now being sought from some 30 African countries. To receive the programmes viewers will need to buy a four metre satellite dish and a Delta 9000+decoder, and also pay the BBC annual subscription.

The service provides "high quality international news on the hour every hour" plus weather reports, travel, science and current affairs programmes. Hopefully, the BBC will take some heed of Martyn Lewis' advice to include programmes with a positive message of hope and encouragement.

Some countries which have shunned television for decades are now having second thoughts, perhaps partly because they fear the influence of foreign satellite programmes like CNN if they do not.

Tranzilians have for years been served only by TV Zanzibar which can be picked up along the coastal strip. While this was "one of the first colour TV services in Africa" it is now considered outdated and serves only about 50,000 viewers out of a population of 25 million.

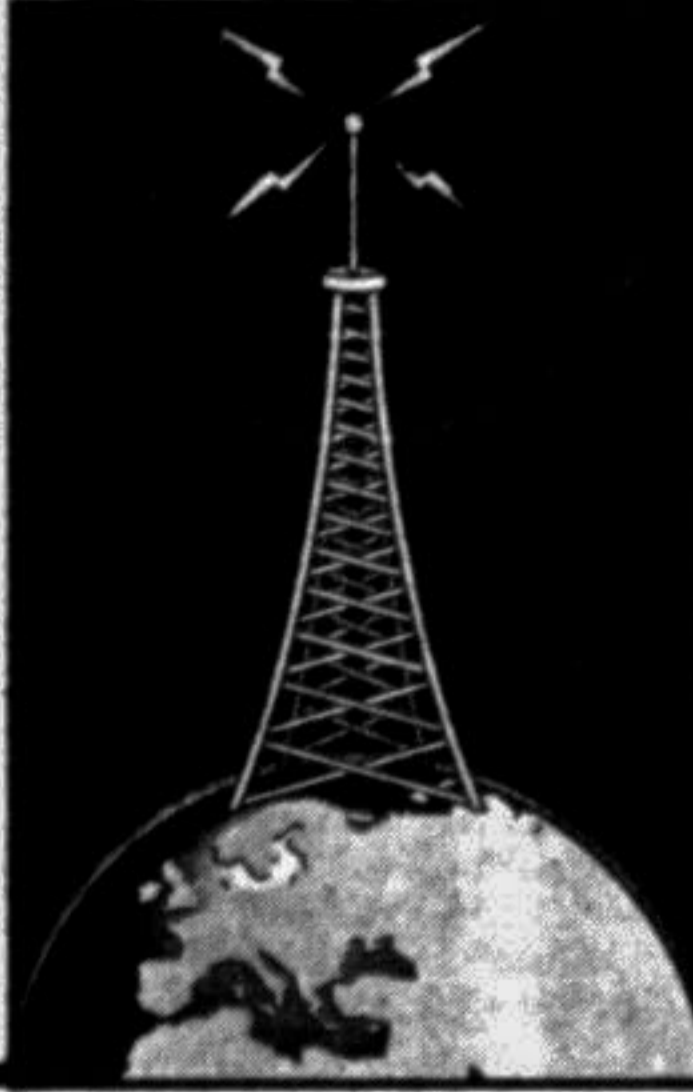
A master plan for broadcasting in Tanzania has been drawn up which aims to modernise TV Zanzibar and introduce television to the mainland. A similar plan has been drawn up for Malawi with the proviso that TV and video are "double-edged tools".

Both countries are concerned that "programmes should be oriented towards the socio-economic development of the nation." The Malawi plan claims: "Crime, violence and socially destructive themes have no place in the programme plans of MBC".

For ideas on how to introduce a positive image to television both countries can turn to neighbouring Zambia. In 1983 the Zambia Broadcasting Corporation experimented with a weekly farming programme which has now been running for 10 years. It is called *Lima Time*, lima being the word for ploughing in many African languages.

'Medium is the message'

In Africa and indeed much of the developing world media operate under state control. Many news agencies and newspapers are state owned. As satellite television expands, to broadcast Western news and entertainment programmes in the Third World, Southern governments are becoming more nervous



In two special articles GEMINI NEWS SERVICE looks at the changes in media in southern Africa

Although originally broadcast mainly in English, the national language, vernacular versions have also been produced in recent years. The current presenter is Mpundu Mwape.

Farming programmes are sometimes criticised because so few farmers in developing countries own television sets. In Africa, however, rural-urban links are extremely strong. Most people still have relatives who are farming or plan to retire to farm a small plot when they reach middle-age.

Zimbabwe has also been experimenting with farming programmes on television, the first series being *For the Farmer* in 1991. Sixty per cent of Zimbabwe's cattle outside the commercial farming areas are owned by town dwellers who visit them at weekends and on holidays.

Under pressure from the World Bank/International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Programme — the parastatal ZBC has been looking for ways of raising revenue. Programmes sponsored by aid organisations and commercial companies are now being planned.

In March 1993 the German technical assistance agency GTZ sponsored a series of programmes on soil conservation. Soil erosion is a massive national problem in Zimbabwe, with estimated losses of up to 30 tonnes of soil per hectare of cultivated land every year.

Another subject where television has come into its own as a means of educating people

about a national problem is Aids.

The potential for more positive television in developing countries is considerable if broadcasting corporations take care with structuring their schedules. The dominance of Hollywood films can be overcome if a real effort is made to use films from a wider range of countries.

Cyprian Ndawana, TV commentator of Harare's *Sunday Mail*, recently criticised the length of time taken before the locally produced film *Neria* was screened. Repeating positive programmes can help to tip the scales.

In an attempt to reduce the negative cultural effects of too many Western programmes some countries have adopted severe censorship. Ghana, for instance, restricts popular American offerings to one series per night.

But the best alternative is to produce programmes locally. In recent years Kenya has been making about 40 hours of programmes per week while Zimbabwe has achieved about 20 hours.

Local programmes do not have to be costly. Some of Zimbabwe's farming programmes have been made by a crew of three people in just one-and-a-half hours' filming, with an additional half hour for editing.

RONALD WATTS has helped to start television farming programmes in both Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Chiluba Reluctant to Give up Media Control

When President Frederick Chiluba took power nearly two years ago, he promised to free Zambia's state-controlled media. But his Movement for Multi-party Democracy government seems to be in no hurry to fulfil its promise. The country's media industry wants, reports Gemini News Service, to privatise Zambia's two main daily newspapers and create an independent broadcasting authority answerable to parliament.

Cedric Pulford writes from Lusaka

ALMOST two years after the elections that brought multi-party democracy to Zambia, the country's mainly state-controlled news media are still struggling to find a new role.

Expression is far freer than under former President Kenneth Kaunda. Newspapers, television and radio can cover all political parties, and vigorous views not always to the government's liking are found in feature articles and readers' letters.

But ministerial rhetoric and non-story ceremonies remain strongly in evidence on news pages and even more in broadcast bulletins — the familiar recipe from one-party state days.

Zambia's approach to the privatisation of news media is being watched in Africa and beyond for pointers it may provide to other liberalising nations.

Discouragingly for supporters of independent media, the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) government of President Frederick Chiluba seems to be in no hurry to give up any of its media holdings, which include the country's two daily newspapers.

Nor does it show signs of ending practices like the registration of publications or the distribution of the foreign news agencies Reuters, Agence France-Presse and others through the filter of the state-owned Zambia News Agency (ZANA).

Chiluba is rumoured to have decided personally not to sell off either the *Times of Zambia* or the *Zambia Daily Mail* — a stance bound to appear even more compelling to MMD politicians as the 1996 elections gear nearer and the government scrambles for popularity amid soaring inflation and rising unemployment precipitated by the Structural Adjustment Programme imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Another blow to Chiluba government came in mid-August when ten members of parliament belonging to his party resigned over charges of corruption.

The government apparently feels that so long as anyone else can start a newspaper there is no reason why it should not keep the two it owns. (For most of the Kaunda years the *Times* was privately owned, by London-based Lonrho group.)

In the journalistic and international investor communities there is some sympathy for the government to keep a voice — party-owned newspapers are common in Europe, for instance — but to control all the singers in the choir is felt to compromise the MMD's commitment to democratic pluralism.

Perhaps the government's views will be changed by a report published in August by the Media Reform Committee.

which represents the country's media industry. It wants privatisation of both daily newspapers as well as state-owned printers and distributors, and for an independent broadcasting authority answerable to parliament.

But if the daily newspapers were put up for sale it is not clear that anyone would actually want to buy them. They have large staffs and obsolete equipment and the combined daily sale in a nation of eight-and-a-half million is under 50,000 copies — just six copies per thousand population.

Meanwhile, the independent *Weekly Post* is believed to have overtaken *The Times* as the nation's biggest-selling newspaper. *The Post* is vigorous, annoying and stimulating. Currently it is linking Princess Nakatindi Wina, a government minister, with allegations of drug smuggling and financial corruption.

It has been on the receiving end of numerous writs for defamation, but in its two years of life (starting in the late Kaunda days) has never had a libel judgement against it.

Managing director Fred M'membe received the attention of the police in June over a leaked cabinet document, but the paper continues to appear freely on the streets.

There have been calls for a Press Council operating a code of conduct as a way to maintain acceptable media standards. Codes of conduct are not just about controlling journalists. They also permit journalists to do things. For instance, Britain's voluntary Press Complaints Commission operates a code that allows reporters wide latitude to use subterfuge — concealing one's identity, pretending to be somebody other than a journalist, bugging, secret filming — providing certain conditions are met.

The conditions are that the information is in the public interest, and that it is not obtain-

able by other methods. This philosophy has produced many worthwhile disclosures that are the very stuff of investigative journalism.

One of the most ingenious came in the aftermath of the Lockerbie air disaster, when a newspaper and a TV station had staff obtain jobs as cleaners at London's Heathrow Airport. Each "cleaner" was able to place a dummy bomb on parked jumbo jets — proving that security had not been made fool-proof as the authorities had claimed.

Anyone with newspaper ambitions in Zambia might simply decide to launch their own paper.

But they would certainly not covert the existing dailies for their distribution systems. *The Times* is printed on the Copperbelt, not in the capital Lusaka, and sometimes comes late. Livingstone, the biggest town in the south of Zambia, does not get either morning paper until mid-afternoon.

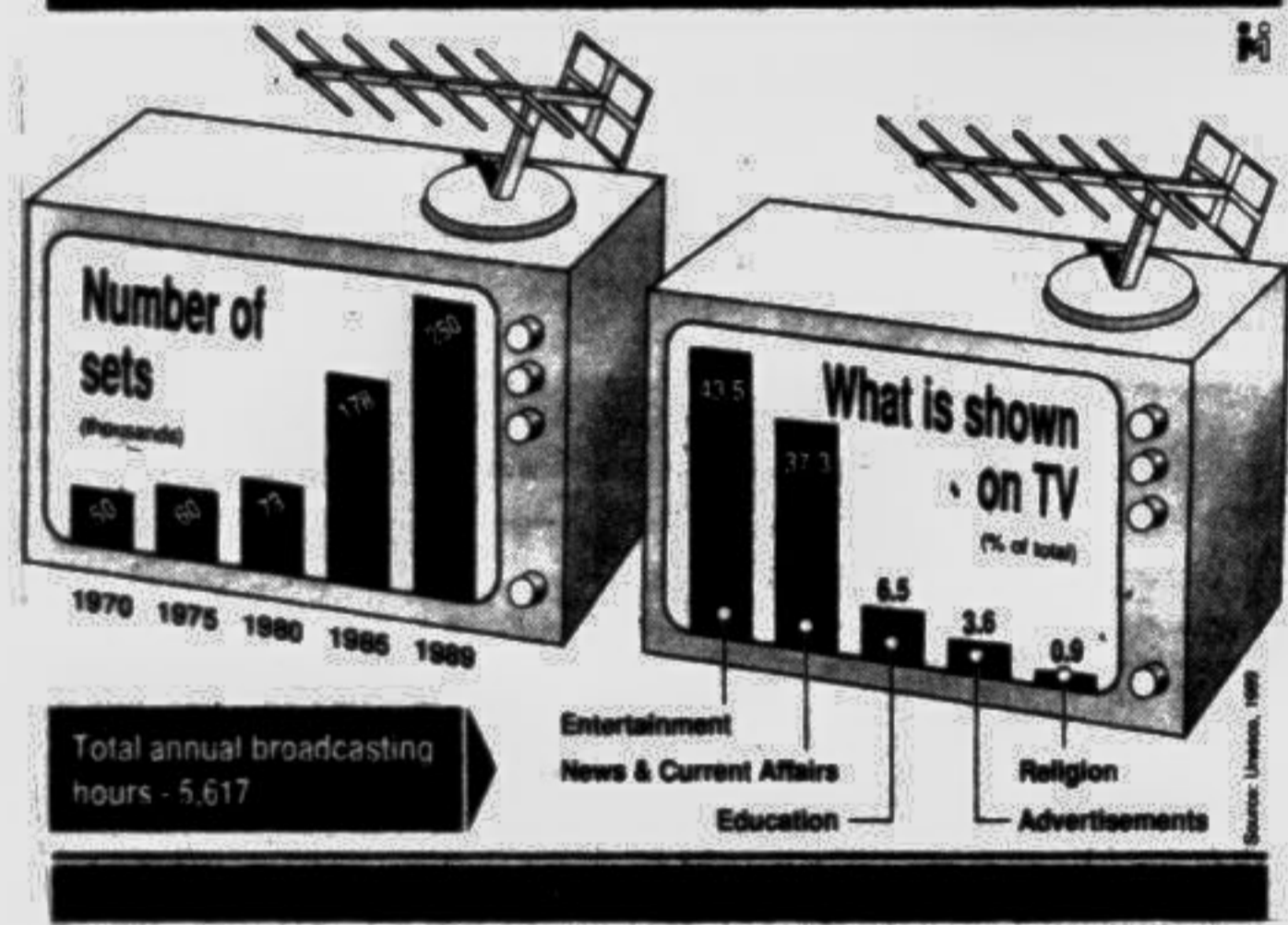
The low newspaper sales reflect the fact that for many people a paper has become a luxury item. Yet for the would-be Zambian press baron underlying factors remain good: national adult literacy is 73 per cent and urbanisation is 56 per cent — both high for Africa.

The issue of privatisation for Zambia's government newspapers might fizzle out if the *Weekly Post* goes daily and other papers start up.

That would still leave state control over radio, television and the national news agency, but a section of the media would have become free. And if the Zambian readers decide that they are bored with MMD rhetoric the government press may find itself in the embarrassing position of running in the footsteps of its new competitors.

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How TV grew in Zimbabwe



Finns are Still Wary of Post-Cold War Russia

Jeffrey Heinrich writes from Helsinki

IT has been said that in war the first casualty is the truth. But truth can also die in peacetime. It did to some extent in Finland until the break up of the neighbouring Soviet Union in 1991. Only now is the whitewash beginning to fade.

Since its defeat by the Soviet Union in World War Two, neutral Finland has been governed by consensus between politicians, employers and trade unions.

This consensus has meant selective silence, official or otherwise, on matters that touch on the Russians. These days, with Russia's shadow retreating, some of the traditional Finnish caution has dissipated.

Said former Finnish diplomat Max Jakobson: "There has been no censorship, just a strong consensus in the leading media to support the policy of neutrality of the Finnish state."

Examples of this kind of open "conspiracy of silence" are numerous in recent Finnish history.

When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Finland did not add its voice to the condemnation of the West, but described the invasion instead as a great-power conflict, in which it, as a neutral nation, would not interfere.

When fallout from the Chernobyl nuclear power station disaster in 1986 hit Finland, the Finnish media tried not to apportion blame but rather simply describe events.

When separatists in the Baltic republics advocated unilateral independence from the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, Finland followed the Soviet line that they would first have to gain the right to secede under the country's constitution.

When Soviet generals staged an abortive coup against Mikhail Gorbachev and his reformist leadership in 1991, Finland took its time to see who would prevail before condemning the putschists.

There have been some exceptions to the rule, inside and outside the press. In 1983, for example, after the Soviets shot down a Korean Airlines passenger jet over Sakhalin Island, pilots of the national airline Finnair joined an international

During the Cold War, Finland maintained selective silence, official or otherwise, on matters that touched on the Soviet Union. A kind of self-censorship governed Finnish journalists' reports and commentaries on Soviet affairs. Now that Russia's shadow is retreating some of the traditional Finnish caution has dissipated. Finns now fear instead, the spillover effects of crime and violence from their giant eastern neighbour.

boycott of flights to Moscow — an overtly political gesture unprecedented in post-war Finnish history.

Likewise, in 1984, Finnish television allowed the daughter of Soviet dissident scientist Andrei Sakharov to plead, during prime time (but in Swedish), for her father's release from house arrest in Gorky.

Outright censorship has, despite Jakobson's assertion, sometimes occurred. For example, when Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev was in power, the books of Russian dissident writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, as well as a film based on *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, were banned for a spell in Finland.

A kind of self-censorship governed Finnish journalists' reports and commentaries on Soviet affairs, especially in the state broadcasting system and in newspapers affiliated with Finland's major political parties.

Political analyst Jyrki Iivonen, of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in Helsinki, said: "It was mainly a political phenomenon, and it filtered into the media to a certain extent."

Researchers and journalists tended to avoid taking on topics that would give them political problems with the Soviet Union. We closed our eyes to the abuse of human rights there, to the inefficiency of their economic system, and to false interpretations of certain historical events.



For years, for example, Finns were told they were to blame for the so-called Winter War of 1939-40 with Russia, when in fact Russia invaded with no just cause. Likewise, Lenin was said to have "granted" Finland its independence in 1917, when in fact the Finns seceded unilaterally, opposed by Finnish communists who were backed by Lenin.

If Finnish reporters wrote objectively about the Soviets, it was at their peril. Olli Kivinen, foreign editor and columnist at *Helsingin Sanomat*, the country's largest daily (circulation 500,000), remembers his newspaper being called onto the carpet by Russian diplomats after reporting about the private life of Brezhnev.

His and other papers also suffered from a lack of concrete statistics on Soviet society. Kivinen said: "We know now that the Soviets systematically falsified data, but at the time we

didn't see how desperate the condition of the country was."

In Finland, Soviet diplomats and cultural commissars encouraged media silence and whitewashing. According to one Finnish journalist now in Moscow, the Soviets often tried to intervene in newsroom decisions by writing and visiting editors, especially if they sniffed any hint of anti-Soviet reporting. Their "suggestions" were not often taken up, but their intervention nevertheless had a "chilling effect" on free reporting by the Finnish media, the Moscow reporter said.

To the Soviets, the effect was obvious. In the early 1980s, Alexander Prokhorenko directed the Soviet cultural centre in Helsinki, the only such centre in a capitalist country at the time.

"My general impression in those days was that Finnish newspapers didn't write strong things about the Soviet Union directly," he recalled in St. Petersburg, where he now directs foreign relations for the Russian Academy of Sciences.

"The journalists understood that we lacked certain things in our country, but they were silent. When I asked them about this, they would say it was simply a kind of self-censorship, that there was no official government line telling them what and what not to say."

In hindsight, self-censorship was perhaps excusable in a nation that shared a 1,300-kilometre border with Europe's mightiest and most militarised superpower, where 300,000 Russian troops stood poised on the other side of the frontier (their numbers have since swelled by 50,000, following pullouts from the Baltics and Germany). But some Finns are ashamed at their country's kowtowing.

Two years ago, University of Helsinki history professor Timo Vihavainen published a popular book that ridiculed Finland for bowing to the Russians, both in parliament and in the press. *Finland in An Awkward Pose* showed Finns as being ridiculous without even realising it, the author said in a recent interview. The same holds true today, he maintained: "People think we're critical now, more

independent in relation to the Soviet Union, but we're not."

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Finns have been able to read more about their eastern neighbour in their daily press. And some of the news that is now fit to print in Finnish papers puts Russia in a decidedly bad light.

Reports on the infancy of Russian mafia activity in Finland, on environmental damage from leaking nuclear power stations, on the smuggling of drugs, on the trade in prostitutes, are all gaining more currency among readers who used to fear a different kind of Russian invasion.

Iivonen noted: "It's concrete. Continued on page 11"

East German Teenagers and the Media-Revolution

Achieving Western Standards Positive Future Expectations

by Manuela Gobel

Given the significant role played by the media in the lives of young people, they are naturally susceptible to any changes in this area, both in regard to their leisure habits, social orientation and role-models. Yet, the impact of the media revolution on the new federal states has been gentle rather than turbulent. According to a study by the Munich-based *Deutsches Jugendinstitut, DJI*, (German institute for Young People) the use of the media within the last two years has almost reached western levels. However, since the youth culture in the former GDR was already influenced by western media before unification, these findings merely confirm an established trend.

YOUNG people are keenly aware of the latest pop groups, films, entertainment shows and what is currently "in". Despite receiving less pocket money, east German teenagers take owning a cassette recorder, a walkman or a television just as much for granted as do their western peers. Their bedrooms are being transformed increasingly into "media centres", where they spend up to six hours daily listening to music, reading and above all watching television. Based at its branch office in Leipzig, the institute launched a survey to investigate the extent and implications of the "media revolution" among young east Germans. Their findings are now contained in a report entitled *Jugend und Medien 1992* (Youth and Media 1992), published by Vistas Verlag in

Berlin. Listening to music is still the most popular pastime for 13-17 year-olds. Teenagers sampled in East Berlin and Saxony listened to the radio on average one and a half hours a day, and a similar time is devoted to playing music cassettes, LPs or CDs. However, since most youngsters have access to a video recorder and every second youngster has a television at home, they often spend their leisure time within their own four walls, visiting the cinema, pubs or sports events far less frequently than before unification. Another reason for this increasing domesticity is, however, the lack of cultural amenities. Where local communities have provided young people with premises and funds, they are used intensively. Television is also growing in appeal for young east Germans.

Whereas in 1987 they devoted one and a half hours daily to this activity, 2 hours a day are now spent watching feature films, ad-spots and game shows, catered for by private stations such as RTL and SAT 1. Yet television is also a source of information. Over 70 per cent of the 1600 young people interviewed reported watching television news programmes several times weekly. In contrast, the print media are now "out" among east German school children and trainees, with just over half relying on daily (usually regional) newspapers for information, compared to the 70 per cent who read a newspaper daily in 1990. Youngsters in the former "nation of readers" have less interest in books, continuing a trend observed in the Eighties. On average, young people in the

new federal states read one book of fiction or non-fiction per month. However, 40 per cent admit to never even opening a book.

The supremacy of television, however, should not be construed as an indication of passive consumer behaviour. The study revealed that young east Germans are also active in their spare-time. Creative hobbies such as drawing, photography or writing poetry are becoming increasingly important leisure time activities for over one third of those sampled. On the other hand, the interviewees expressed less interest in tinkering with bicycles, mopeds or electronic devices.

Similarly, the trend towards entertainment via television and radio, coinciding with a reduced interest in current events. Continued on page 11

