Ellen Namhila's *The Price of Freedom*, and that of those who stayed behind and experienced the weight of the South African military occupation, such as in Kaleni Hiyalwa's *Meekulu's Children*.

The *Purple Violet of Oshaantu* does not touch on these issues at all. The setting, characters and events are those of an imaginary village, Oshaantu, in the north of Namibia. National politics do not figure. Windhoek is a place where men disappear to in search of work. The life of the novel is the life of the village, and one of the novel's successes is bringing the village to life in its richness — even for those readers who have no personal experience of such a community.

The novel opens with a celebration of harvest: *It is that time of the year again. The season when our village, Oshaantu, camouflages itself in a rich green carpet and provides a breathtaking sight... We had good rains this year and are promised plenty to eat... I gently stroked the rough surface of the omohangu millet in appreciation of the abundance of Mother Nature. God is good, I think.*

The land, the seasons, the village, the work of women, are the context for the central story of the novel, which is the story of a friendship between two women — Ali and Kauna — and their contrasting relationships with their husbands. Ali has a husband who works far away and returns home rarely, but is kind and supportive of her when he is home. Kauna has an abusive husband who beats her repeatedly and who moves between her homestead and that of his latest girlfriend.

The title of the book comes from references to the beautiful flower that grows round the homesteads in the village. Kauna is likened to this flower, but her beauty is spoiled by the beatings she receives from her husband. On a visit to her parents, to recover from one particularly violent beating, her father tries to encourage her to make a choice about
the marriage:

'Child,' he said, 'don't wait until it is too late. I know your mother wants your marriage to work. But I have seen women who have died in this thing called marriage, or have done things you don't want to hear about. I don't want it to get to this... You must do what you think is best for you.'

That time, Kauna returns to her husband. Her stand against him comes later.

Few novels focus on village life and bring it to life as successfully as this one. There are some classic African novels, particularly from Nigeria and Kenya, which describe village life in the changing context of colonization. These all focus on the experiences of boys.

Andreas' novel is unusual in that it tells us the story of the women of the village, not the boys, women who are funny, creative, strong, bright even though not well-schooled, and who mix modern and traditional values and strive to maintain their dignity and their right to make choices.

Yet Andreas does not romanticize rural life. Her novel depicts village life in its complexity. There is conflict and competition between women in the village, as well as cooperation and friendship. There are women who try to impose old values that oppress other women, and who gossip and accuse each other of witchcraft. There is the reality of hard physical work in the fields and the juggling which women face all over the world, trying to fit in all their daily tasks, on the land, in the home, looking after children and elderly relatives, maintaining a relationship with their husbands.

On one significant occasion, the women of Oshaantu come together to help Kauna and her children prepare the fields before the rains come - a tradition called okakungungu. Ali prepares food and omalovu and the women come together.

We worked and worked.
We worked with one spirit.
We worked as if we competed for a prize.
We sang in harmony.
When we finished one song, the women would start another one.
We sang all kinds of songs:
songs of our ancestors,
frightening songs,
songs of sorrow,
songs of joy,
songs of forgiveness,
songs of unity and hope.
When we did not sing, the omatemos [hoses] did. We let the music of the omatemos take their course, loud and clear.
'We call on our ancestors, our great-grandmothers,' one of the women called and the rest of us confirmed. We called on them...
'Wake up and look at us.'
'Yes wake up...'
'Wake up and watch our bent backs.'
'Yes wake up.'
'Wake up and look how hard we work.'
'Yes wake up...'
'Wake up and join your granddaughters.'
Yes wake up...
'Wake up and bless us.'
'Yes wake up...'

...The women understood Kauna's situation. There was a wonderful spirit, a spirit of sisterhood. For once, 'all ill-feeling and hatred were forgotten. We were one again, sisters sharing a common cause.

Through Andreas' descriptions of work in the home and in the fields, the making and selling of produce in the market - all the domains of women - she gives significance to the work of women. Yet the sisterhood is broken by the realities of power and authority in the village - which is patriarchal. The absent men return, the male elders gather to decide the fate of Kauna and her children when her husband suddenly dies.

Kauna is accused of bewitching or poisoning her husband. Relatives arrive to mourn him and they compete with each other for access to his property. Kauna in the end makes a choice. She takes a stand which shocks relatives on both sides of her family, to show them all that she will no longer pretend that her husband was a good man. She chooses the moment when convention would have it that she publicly bewail the loss of her husband, to show that she does not mourn or miss him.

As a widow, Kauna has no rights to the homestead she shared with her husband or the fields she put so much work into. Moreover, her refusal to mourn her husband antagonizes his family. Kauna and her children are cast out of the village. Nevertheless, she leaves feeling strong:

'...You have not seen anything yet. You know what happens to the mahangu millet? After it has been destroyed by cattle, it finds the strength to repair itself and grow better. It is often bigger and more vibrant than the millet that has not been threatened by any danger and cut to the ground,' she said.

Andreas' book has appealed to readers in Namibia and internationally. Three hundred copies have sold in Namibia alone in the three months since publication date, which is a record for this small market.

Andreas' was born and grew up in Walvis Bay although her family is from northern Namibia. She trained as a teacher in Ongwediva Teachers College, taught for five years, first at a junior secondary school in Ongandjera and then at Oluno Senior Secondary School. She went on to do a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education at the University of Namibia. She worked for some years as Associate Director of the US Peace Corps, and is currently working with the UN High Commission for Refugees. She is continuing to write.