

Kristin Williamson, *Brothers to Us: The Story of a Remarkable Family's Fight Against Apartheid*, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1997. pp. 301. \$25.

In *Brother to Us* Kristin Williamson (an Australian writer and journalist) tells the story of four white South African Brothers, Gavin, Ronnie, Valence and Cheeky Watson, who become heavily involved in the struggle against apartheid. In a country where rugby is sacred, the Watsons, with their affluence, business success, rugby prowess and Christianity, seem to embody white South Africa. However, the Watson brothers are far from the norm. Fluent in Xhosa and brought up to believe in racial equality, they condemn the apartheid system which they see as contrary to their Christian values. The Watson brothers become involved in the fight against apartheid after participating in a non-racial rugby game in the Port Elizabeth township of Veeplas soon after the 1976 Soweto riots. While Cheeky Watson's participation in the game costs him a place in the Springboks, this is more than compensated for by the feeling he experienced after the game: 'We're on their [black] shoulders and they are immediately taking us into the liberation struggle ... You suddenly begin to feel their heartbeat'. The Watsons subsequently become involved in the ANC and they use coaching sessions in the townships to politicise young blacks in the struggle against apartheid.

Brothers to Us is divided into two main parts. The first part, based almost exclusively on interviews conducted with the Watsons over a ten year period, deals with the brothers' lives up until Mandela's appointment as President in 1994. The second part comprises more recent interviews with friends and foes of the Watsons and sets out to test the validity of their story. It also includes a chapter on the lives and ambitions of the Watsons in the 1990s. But the result of this structure is that Williamson's book is disjointed. It would have more cohesion if she had integrated these two sets of material. These problems are exacerbated by Williamson's very limited use of other historical sources, and her consequent failure to set the Watson's story within a soundly-researched historical context. Williamson also neglects to discuss the relationship between sport and politics in any depth, although she plays down the significance of the former, suggesting that rugby was merely a vehicle of convenience; 'It wasn't so much the sport ... but the fact that young blacks were being politicised through rugby'. This accords with recent historical scholarships, which suggest that the capacity of sport to bridge the racial divide, especially in the absence of other social, political, cultural and economic

changes, is superficial.

Despite this, *Brothers to Us* is valuable in that it is the first detailed account of the Watsons' involvement in anti-apartheid struggle, especially their membership of the ANC. Their participation in the struggle caused the Watsons to suffer a considerable white backlash, state-sponsored attacks on themselves and their families, violence, economic hardship, prison and trial. Williamson regards the Watsons as 'reluctant heroes'. Disappointingly, she fails to investigate in any depth the difficult issue of the relative importance of the Watsons' actions in contributing to the end of apartheid. Her analysis of black politics, and of ANC politics in particular, is superficial.

Williamson's *Brothers To Us* is a detailed exploration of the involvement of the Watson brothers in the struggle against apartheid. However, Williamson's structure and style mean she does not use the resources available to her to full effect. She fails to fully contextualize the Watsons' story within the wider social, economic and political conditions. Nor does she come to grips with the complexities of the relationship between sport, race and politics.

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