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This book’s 16 chapters are well-organised into five parts: Historical legacy; Governance and military security; Economic integration; Human security; and External actors. The three editors each contribute a chapter in addition to the ‘Introduction’ and ‘Conclusion’. It contains the obligatory three page list of ninety-four abbreviations and acronyms, plus tables, figures, a map and boxes. It also has a foreword by the energetic Adekeye Adebajo, whose Centre for Conflict Resolution initiated the project that became this book.

Dawn Nagar merits praise for being almost the first researcher to realise the importance for sub-regional integration of one of our continent’s three operational regional power pools, the Southern African Power Pool. Few are aware that this is geographically the biggest competitive power pool in the world. One suggestion for improvement if there is a second edition: surely the salient point in the Chikova chapter she cites is not the table on installed capacity versus available capacity, but Chikova’s figures 10.2, 10.3, and 10.4 on inter-state trading in electricity?

The opening chapters by Gilbert Khadiagala and Kaire Mbuende ground readers in the history and context of today’s Southern African Development Community (SADC). They collectively provide a solid reality check on the SADC’s limitations and problems. There are two regrettable omissions of
basic information. Mbuende correctly makes repeated references to SADC being ‘unable to provide adequate resources and sufficient staffing to their Secretariat […] no true regional capability was created’ (41). Yet although he was a former Executive Secretary of SADC, he nowhere informs readers what the budget was! It is left up to Chris Landsberg to tell us that the 2009/10 budget for the Secretariat was $54m – of which $28 came from foreign donors (67).

Even more frustrating is the lack of quantification on the SADC personnel establishment. Mbuende, in addition to the quotes above, mourns that ‘The bottom line is the number of staff that member states are willing to finance in the Secretariat’ (56) but nowhere states how many posts they do have. Landberg alludes to the Secretariat’s ‘limited staff’ (64), ‘continues to be understaffed’ (70), ‘suffered from weak strategic management, poor administrative systems and weak technical competencies’ (70). This reviewer’s research indicated a number of years ago that the SADC Secretariat numbered under 120 persons, but it would be good to have this confirmed or corrected, and updated. Equally important would be to inform scholars how many posts on the SADC establishment are for econometrists, statisticians, and trade lawyers.

Mzukisi Qobo is another contributor whose excellent analytic chapter succinctly draws our attention to a historic irony. The Southern African Customs Union (SACU) owes its invention to British imperialism, when Lord Milner summoned the Customs Conference of 1903, to order all the colonies he ruled over to form a customs union. Eleven decades later, EU imperialism (including the UK) seeks to dismember the SACU through three divide-and-rule Economic Partnership Agreements. His detailed account of the EU’s brusque strategy and tactics ought to be compulsory reading for all foreign policy journalists who glibly criticise our Government for its anti-western bias. It should also be prescribed reading for all students and negotiators-in-training.

Another strength of this book is David Monyae’s chapter on the development finance institutions, often overlooked in literature on African integration. He reminds readers how both the Industrial Development Corporation and the Development Bank of Southern Africa have had their statutory mandates broadened to empower them to operate in the rest of Africa on infrastructure projects.

The volume closes with one chapter on each of the EU, US, and Chinese policies and practices to the SADC and its member states and economies.
One mistake is when an author alleges that atomic power is ‘the most cost-effective means of generating electricity’ (134). To the contrary, the energy minister’s own figures are that electricity from atomic power will cost 600 per cent as much per megawatt as importing hydropower from the Inga rapids proposals (Business Day February 29, 2012).

There are three surprising gaps in coverage.

First, there is not a whisper about the rise and fall of the SADC Tribunal – beyond the claim that the SADC realised the need to strengthen the SADC Tribunal! (71). Scholars must turn to Gathii’s and other publications for this epic of how courageous judicial activists sought to assert jurisdiction over human rights issues far beyond their treaty mandate. This culminated in the authoritarian Zimbabwean regime successfully lobbying the SADC summit to gut the Tribunal and get the judges summarily fired, without them even being allowed to collect their personal belongings (Cape Times June 30, 2011). This makes the rule of law in SADC revert to President Kruger’s firing of Chief Justice Kotze in 1898.

Second, from around 2007 the official SADC website proudly ran beneath their masthead a timeline showing the community upgrading its status to a free trade area in 2008, to a customs union in 2010, to a common market in 2015, and to a monetary union in 2016, culminating in a common currency in 2018 (for example, see this volume: 7). As the deadline for a customs union loomed close, suddenly, near the end of 2009, this website timeline vanished without a trace, and with no explanation, as if in Orwell’s 1984 re-writing of history. While more than one contributor refers to the SADC-EAC-COMESA tripartite negotiations to harmonise and merge their free trade areas into one stretching from Cape to Cairo, they neglect to mention a downside. Nowhere does this volume explore the fact that the SADC has postponed indefinitely its goals of becoming a customs union, then a common market, still less adopting a single currency, until after the achievement of a continental free trade area. Extrapolation of past progress suggests this might realistically take perhaps two more decades.

Third, more than one chapter mentions in passing that both the SACU and SADC embrace states that are very unequal in economic development. They note in a sentence or two that it is in the nature of free trade areas and customs unions to benefit the country containing the strongest companies far more than the least urbanised and industrialised micro-states. This conundrum for Pan-Africanism merits a chapter on its own, even more so to project the consequences when SADC actually harmonises with EAC and COMESA to
form one FTA. The EU has major mechanisms for compensation funds and agricultural subsidies of its poorest states. ECOWAS proposed a compensation fund, which member states refused to finance, after which the fund morphed into a regional bank, which only offers loans, not grants. The 1991 Abuja treaty for an African Economic Community also made provision for such a compensation fund – which remains stillborn – to aid smaller states for the costs of joining a customs union which is dominated by stronger states with stronger economies.

The SADC has not started any equivalent fund to compensate. This has only occurred within SACU alone, ironically initiated in 1969 by the apartheid ancient regime, in its attempts to retain the BLS countries as client states. Since the funds that, say, South Africa and Angola, could divert from their own citizens to the rest of SADC will always be inadequate for the region’s needs, SADC needs to be innovative in using asymmetry and variable geometry to mitigate the regional extreme uneven development of 13 decades of the mining-industrial economy. Historically, South African governments have used a variety of carrots and sticks to block every project of auto manufacturers to open any assembly plants in the BLS countries.

Addressing, and redressing, this uneven development issue will become yet more important when the merged SADC-EAC-COMESA becomes in turn part of the Continental Free Trade Area proposed in the AU’s Minimum Integration Programme. The Pan-Africanist literature makes far less mention of this red flag issue than its left critics.