Changing Norms through Actions: The Evolution of Sovereignty by **Jennifer M. Ramos.** Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 200pp., £17.99, ISBN 978 0 19 992486 8

This study intends to develop and test a theory that endeavours to answer the question of how understandings of international norms (particularly the norm of absolute sovereignty) change through states' actions. Based on a social psychological approach, the author advances the assumption that 'the concept of sovereignty is moving toward one in which states that are unable to or unwilling to fulfill their domestic and international obligations are forced to relinquish certain sovereign responsibilities to the international community' (p. 3). That is to say, the author argues, 'states risk [military] intervention by other states if they do not comply with generally accepted norms' (p. 3). To demonstrate how the norm of sovereignty changed in the post-Cold War period through military interventions, the study analyses the content of UN Security Council speeches by its five permanent members (the US, Russia, China, the UK and France) in three different policy areas and cases: global terrorism (Afghanistan 2001), massive violations of human rights (Somalia 1992) and the development of weapons of mass destruction (Iraq 2003). The empirical investigation of cases largely confirms the proposed thesis, which is that the notion of absolute sovereignty evolves into contingent sovereignty.

The study's theoretical focus on the influence of states' actions on the normative environment opens up a new analytical path in the study of military intervention and norms formation in international relations. More importantly, through insights from cognitive dissonance, the author elegantly introduces a new perspective to a long-debated issue in the IR discipline: the interplay of agency and structure. This approach enables the author to explain how, in some cases, intervener and non-intervener states' negative responses to attempts at change (mainly as a result of state culpability and self-interest) do contribute to the evolution of a normative environment.

The study's state-centric scope and its excessive emphasis on the actions/interactions among main state actors lead it to dismiss the material and ideational causes of the interventions at local and regional levels. Isolating the study's outlook from these political causes

enables the author to successfully construct a system-level and policy-relevant analysis on the evolution of the absolute sovereignty norm. But, by doing so, the study overlooks the roles of the permanent members of the Security Council and their internal politics in the configuration of the political processes and their normative outcomes. However, the book's social psychological perspective helps students of IR to observe the centrality/evolution of the sovereignty norm in various domestic and international political contexts.

Ismail Erdem
(Royal Holloway, University of London)

Liberal Barbarism: The European Destruction of the Palace of the Emperor of China by **Erik Ringmar.** Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 268pp., £62.50, ISBN 9781137268907

During October 1860, British and French troops looted Yuanmingyuan at the outskirts of Beijing. The sacking of what is commonly known in the Western World as the Summer Palace of the Chinese Emperor marked the dreadful culmination of the North China Campaign in which European states aimed to enforce trade relations with China and it is the backdrop to Erik Ringmar's remarkable book: *Liberal Barbarism*. Based upon extensive archival research, Ringmar provides a compelling explanation for a paradox. The destruction of the imperial summer palace was nothing less than a barbaric act that was committed by forces that set out to China in order to spread the European idea of 'civilisation'. What makes Ringmar's book remarkable in particular, however, is his conceptual framework.

Applying the concept of 'performance', Ringmar demonstrates the intercultural misunderstandings and differences between China and Europe during the nineteenth century, which helps to understand the rising tensions between them. Performances rest on prescribed scripts and are deliberately undertaken by actors on a public stage viewed by different audiences in order 'to demonstrate, explain, or teach something' (p. 135) to them. The destruction of Yuanmingyuan can thus be seen as a performance by British and French troops to satisfy a European audience that was still outraged by the previous kidnapping and eventual killing of a group of Europeans. Among them had also been Thomas Bowlby, the correspondent of *The Times*.

However, it was also a performance for a Chinese audience, as it intended to demonstrate to the Chinese court and people that Europe had surpassed China militarily, technologically and economically and become the new centre of the world. Previously, China had considered itself as the 'Middle Kingdom', as its Sino-centric system rested on the leadership of China. However, unlike the Westphalian system of nation states, the Sino-centric system was not territorially focused. Hence, the Chinese imperial court did not exert geographical control over its entire sphere of influence, but it was relational, and the *kowtow* was a symbolic way to reassure China's centrality in this system.

Studying these performances inscribed in the barbaric act committed by European forces helps Ringmar to transcend the Westphalian system as he argues for appreciating the benefits of other systems that do not promote conflict, but strengthen the importance of cooperation. Therefore, non-violent performances as suggested in the Sino-centric system might indeed be more suitable for twenty-first-century politics.

Felix Rösch
(Coventry University)

Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding on the Ground: Victims and Ex-Combatants by **Chandra Sriram**, **Jemima Garcia-Godos**, **Johanna Herman and Olga Martin-Ortega (eds).** Abingdon: Routledge, 2013. 312pp., £24.99, ISBN 978 0 415 65586 6

Transitional justice and peace-building initiatives often coexist in the same post-conflict environments. This book sets out to examine the area of overlap between these two practices. In particular, the volume focuses on the interface between approaches to transitional justice, which place victims at their centre, and programmes for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of combatants within peace-building projects.

The book is divided into two parts. The first features thematic contributions exploring the general links between victim-centred approaches to transitional justice and DDR. These chapters discuss the role of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, the relationship between transitional justice and peace-building in ongoing conflicts, the potential for integrating DDR and transitional justice, and the interaction between traditional justice practices and transitional justice. The second part presents a series of case studies in which both transitional justice and peace-building initiatives were implemented, including Cambodia, Lebanon, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Uganda, Colombia and Kenya.

This volume evidences the shift in focus of transitional justice from processes of democratisation after authoritarianism to post-conflict peace-building. Thus, instead of dealing with the traditional trade-off between the normative claims of justice and the pragmatic demands of the political transition, it tackles the conflict between the normative demands of victims and the pragmatic demands of reintegrating combatants. The logic is the same: How does one reconcile normative aspirations with practical realities?

The individual contributions in this volume are concise and engaging. They also seek to find institutional and practical answers to the difficulties posed by implementing transitional justice and peace-building initiatives simultaneously. They grapple with issues of coordination and integration as well as timing and sequencing and suggest that better communication is needed between the two areas. However, some of the chapters do not concentrate specifically on the relationship between victim-centred justice and DDR and, instead, address either peace-building or transitional justice in general. Moreover, while the case studies provide a useful juxtaposed description of transitional justice and DDR initiatives, they stop short of providing in-depth analysis of their interaction. Nonetheless, the conclusion does offer helpful policy advice. *Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding on the Ground* will be of great value for scholars and practitioners with an interest in the role of transitional justice in wider peace-building projects.

Marcos Zunino
(University of Cambridge)

We welcome short reviews of books in all areas of politics and international relations. For guidelines on submitting reviews, and to see an up-to-date listing of books available for review, please visit http://www.politicalstudiesreview.org/.