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Jaakko Husa, Interdisciplinary Comparative Law. Rubbing Shoulders with the Neighbours or Standing Alone in a Crowd Cheltenham, UK & Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2022, 256 pp, Hardback, ISBN: 9781802209778

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Interdisciplinary Comparative Law is an intriguing book about the place of comparative law in the field of scientific research. It surveys (and crosses) academic boundaries and engages in conversation with legal and nonlegal disciplines to 'provide a subtle vision of modern comparative law and its interdisciplinary dimensions in opposition to simplified and doctrinally imprinted views' (11). In so doing, it reappraises the formalistic (and often redolent) approaches and doctrinal outcomes that we usually teach our students in law schools. The book may be termed as an existential journey *about* the meaning, the role, and functions of comparative law. Its subtitle confirms this assertion: *Rubbing Shoulders with the Neighbours or Standing Alone in a Crowd* indeed refers to the interdisciplinary implications of comparative-legal methodologies, setting them in the broader context of multiple connections between sundry fields of research.

As an existential journey through the methodologies of comparative law, the book also assesses its identity as a legal discipline. Comparative scholars have repeatedly been 'questioning its … role, approaches, and legitimacy' (3). Jaakko Husa assumes that 'comparative law was (and is) existentially alone in legal academia' (4). Whereas other areas of legal knowledge making up 'the doctrinal study of the law' adopt a point of view 'epistemologically *internal*' to it, 'comparatists look at foreign law from the epistemological point of view of an *outsider*' (6). This locates comparative law in a limbo that accentuates its distinctive nature as regards both legal and non-

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legal disciplines. And this limbo generates a 'state of tension', also flowing 'from the uneasy relation between the hope of being *independent* and the need to be *interdisciplinary*' (8).

Quite unsurprisingly, then, the question of disciplinary identity is pivotal. Husa is interested in ascertaining how, and to what extent, comparative law relates to neighbouring disciplines blending comparative-legal methodologies and other substantive areas of research. Fields of knowledge such as comparative legal history, legal linguistics, and comparative international law pose a challenge to what is considered the distinctive tract of comparative law, i.e. its methodological and critical approach to legal research.

Interdisciplinary Comparative Law is therefore a book that examines what it means to be inter-disciplinary in comparative legal studies. And it is a timely publication. The issue of interdisciplinarity has been simmering for a long time in comparative-law papers, seminars, and academic conferences. Comparative legal scholars, however, have mainly focused on the disciplinary ambitions of the discipline, usually stressing the need to place the law in context. This is, without doubt, a crucial achievement, inasmuch as it entails stepping out of the internal epistemic point of view of mainstream (i.e. doctrinal) legal research, crossing over boundaries, extending investigations beyond the limits marked by legal inquiries, and opening up comparative law to dialogue with legal history, language, literature and culture, economics, sociology, international/global law.

Husa probes the interdisciplinary potential of comparative law in all these areas of knowledge. As he clarifies in the introductory chapter, the attentiveness of comparative law to interdisciplinary research increases the feeling that comparatists still stand alone in the crowd without rubbing shoulders with any neighbouring discipline. It does not come as a surprise that *Standing Alone* and *Rubbing shoulders* are extremely fitting metaphors for the purposes of addressing the condition (and tension) of comparative law. To a broader extent, this book is also about metaphors. This is patent in the chapter dedicated to the relationship between comparative law and cultural-literary imagination. Metaphors are indeed at the heart of legal reasoning: 'writing about law (legally) and writing about law fictionally, are not that far away from each other' (98). This is also apparent in macro-comparative law, where the legal systems of the world are styled in terms of families, and where the problem of 'legal-cultural hybridity' is addressed by using 'more creative and interdisciplinary conceptualisations' and labels (102). Husa recalls his readers' mind Örücü's culinary metaphors for styling mixed jurisdictions. The 'salad bowl' metaphor testifies to 'how socio-culturally and legal-culturally different legal elements form mixed outcomes of various kinds' (107). Likewise, the concept of function, which is borrowed from sociology, points to a further metaphor, i.e. 'function' as a 'figure of speech' that facilitates 'the understanding of legal phenomena … in terms of grasping' analogies and differences between discrete jurisdictions (167–166).

Metaphors populate comparative methodologies. Suffice it to remember how we comparatists resort to terms such as 'dialogue' and 'conversation'. If I understand Husa correctly, metaphors like these seek to pluralise the debate and allow comparative law to rub shoulders with other disciplines, pointing to several steps in the interdisciplinary conversation which makes up comparative law.

The first major step aims to inform comparative law of the methodological and substantive perspective of its neighbouring disciplines. To this end, Husa begins each chapter by supplying a definition of the neighbouring discipline interacting with comparative law, such as in the case of history, duration, time, language, translation, (economic) path dependence, and functionalism.

The second step refers to the methodological uneasiness of comparative scholars when crossing the disciplinary divides. The operation is not without risk. Inter-disciplinary investigations peruse concepts and lexical items borrowed from different academic disciplines. The pendulum swings back and forth between two opposing poles. At one extreme, concepts, arguments, and terms might be used without probing the specialised meaning they have within their epistemic community. At the other extreme, comparative legal scholars may become amateurish, which usually means playing on the field of another discipline by incorrectly applying its methodological rules.

The third step concerns the idea of comparative law being a subversive discipline and a critical scientific method. This is due to the epistemologically *external* point of view adopted, which keeps the precincts of legal studies open and permeable to influxes, interactions, and forms of pollination from the outer world. To put it another way, 'interdisciplinary research appears, perhaps bafflingly, to have a natural place in comparative law' (10).

The book is therefore an attempt to sidestep the methodological uneasiness of comparative law. At the same time, it is also a journey *à la recherche* of a fruitful relation with its neighbouring disciplines. As said, Husa engages in a conversation with manifold areas of studies, a few of which seem to rub shoulders with comparative law. Among the disciplines that fall under the 'comparative' banner, Husa peruses comparative legal history (25–39). There, it seems possible to circumvent the uneasy relation with historical research framed by Alan Watson, who subjugated 'comparative law to legal history even though he claimed to defend comparative law as a discipline' (15). There is also room for exploring the 'comparative' in global law and public/private international law. There, however, the room left for interdisciplinary research is narrowed by the application of universalism. Like global law, comparative international law 'does not embrace diversity seriously enough as it still seeks to hold on its epistemic conception of international law' (224), which is rooted in the generalisation of Western-related categories.

Husa then probes the validity of the comparative-legal methodological toolbox in interdisciplinary research. Issues of comparison and translation are examined through the lenses of 'transcreation', i.e. an intriguing lexical item that 'refers to recreating a text for a specific target audience' that 'seeks to take into account the different cultural backgrounds between the source and the target cultures'. It is an admixture of 'translating' and 'recreating' (53). Legal and literary transplants are assessed when it comes to comparing how storytellers, legislators, and judges make use of them. Whereas the former ones are free to 'transplant real legal entities … and place them in the imaginary worlds' (90), Husa assumes that legislators and judges are not as free as storytellers; the real world is not one of 'imaginary perfection' and therefore legislative drafters are 'bound by the context of the real world and society'.

By contrast, storytellers shape their preferred law and society 'according to the rules they have created for their imaginary worlds' (96).

Determinism in the form of path dependence also shapes how law and economics engage with comparative law. This interaction opens up further possibilities for rubbing shoulders with other disciplines, inasmuch as path dependence highlights the economic 'relevance of history and elevates its role as a method of explanation' of how legal institutions have changed over time (122). It has also triggered the troublesome 'legal origin' thesis, according to which legal systems are rankable in terms of economic performativity, linking a 'country's legal path of development [to] its path of economic development' (127). Hindrances to such an interdisciplinary approach are manifold; the economic analysis of law has paved the way to the use of quantification in law, which ignores the societal and cultural contexts within which the law is applied. In addition, legal origin research imposes Western (global) standards upon developing countries; this brings about a good dose of 'incommensurability' (145) between comparative law and law and economics, inasmuch as the latter denies legal pluralism, which is in turn at the heart of comparative legal studies (145).

These methodological biases also affect the relationship between sociology and comparative law, where functionalism and universalism perfectly match 'the Western lawyer's legal mind' (170). Accepting that even discrete institutions may fulfil equivalent functions, functionalism assumes that the law is naturally universal even when inflected to create a contextual response, by pointing out how institutional arrangements vary in different countries, even if they are tackling a superficially similar problem. The search for commonalities may help in the process of highlighting mutual borrowings, the common historical evolution of law in different legal contexts, and transplants.

Through his book, Husa unceasingly reappraises this strenuous *recherche* of disciplinary interaction. There are indeed several occasions in which comparative law rubs shoulders with, say, legal linguistics and comparative legal history. Yet, the sense of methodological uneasiness is still present. Doctrinal closure is the force driving comparative law towards non-legal disciplines; Husa is right when he states that 'interdisciplinary research is one way of escaping the loneliness of the comparatist' within legal studies (228). This is only part of the whole truth, though. As Husa argues in the very last lines of his enjoyable book, the task of comparative law is to broaden 'the narrow viewpoint of legal doctrine'; if the latter is 'abandoned, then there is no going around interdisciplinarity' (231).

Playing with word, interdisciplinarity is part of the disciplinary construction of comparative law. It unavoidably prompts us to run counter to the autonomy (and closure) of doctrinal law, thus opening it up to fruitful conversations with the world lying outside mainstream legal academia. As an empirical field of legal research, comparative law is already able to engage with the real world – and this means being interdisciplinary. The discipline is already rubbing shoulders with non-legal fields of research. At the same time, its open posture and critical approach aims to come closer to the doctrinal study of the law. Abandoning the narrow viewpoint of legal doctrine is the purpose of our discipline. Our major task is to challenge mainstream legal scholars in law schools demonstrating that the law is not an unfettered set of univer-

sal derivatives. Quite the opposite: the world is out there to be regulated, explored, also to challenge the epistemologically internal point of view of doctrinal law.

The book is an invaluable addition to the field of comparative law, because it stages it in a broader context that avoids bracketing legal studies for the sake of our being accepted by doctrinal legal scholars. The liminal place (or, as Husa puts it, the state of tension) occupied by comparative law is part of a legal approach to be shared with all the neighbouring-but-non-legal disciplines. Comparative law is already rubbing shoulders with all of them, even with the dogmatic study of the law. Exploring comparative law as an interdisciplinary force is thus Husa's most relevant contribution to the identity of our discipline, as well as one that should encourage us to remain vigilant and keep the door of the law open to a constant conversation with the world out there.