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The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol. 81,
No. 1/2 (1951), 15-22.

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THE COMPARATIVE METHOD IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Huxley Memorial Lecture for 1951

BY PROFESSOR A. R. RADCLIFFE-BROWN, M.A.

What is meant when one speaks of 'the comparative method' in anthropology is the method used by such a writer as Frazer in his *Golden Bough*. But comparisons of particular features of social life can be made for either of two very different purposes, which correspond to the distinction now commonly made in England between ethnology and social anthropology. The existence of similar institutions, customs or beliefs in two or more societies may in certain instances be taken by the ethnologist as pointing to some historical connection. What is aimed at is some sort of reconstruction of the history of a society or people or region. In comparative sociology or social anthropology the purpose of comparison is different, the aim being to explore the varieties of forms of social life as a basis for the theoretical study of human social phenomena.

Franz Boas, writing in 1888 and 1896, pointed out that in anthropology there are two tasks to be undertaken. One kind of task is to 'reconstruct' the history of particular regions or peoples, and this he spoke of as being "the first task". The second task he describes as follows:—"A comparison of the social life of different peoples proves that the foundations of their cultural development are remarkably uniform. It follows from this that there are laws to which this development is subject. Their discovery is the second, perhaps the more important aim of our science. . . . In the pursuit of these studies we find that the same custom, the same idea, occurs among peoples for whom we cannot establish any historical connection, so that a common historical origin cannot be assumed and it becomes necessary to decide whether there are laws that result in the same, or at least similar, phenomena independently of historical causes. Thus develops the second important task of ethnology, the investigation of the laws governing social life." "The frequent occurrence of similar phenomena in cultural areas that have no historical contact suggests that important

results may be obtained from their study, for it shows that the human mind develops everywhere according to the same laws."

Boas included these two tasks in the single discipline which he called sometimes 'anthropology,' sometimes 'ethnology.' To some of us in this country it seems more convenient to refer to those investigations that are concerned with the reconstruction of history as belonging to ethnology and to keep the term social anthropology for the study of discoverable regularities in the development of human society in so far as these can be illustrated or demonstrated by the study of primitive peoples.

Thus, the comparative method in social anthropology is the method of those who have been called 'arm-chair anthropologists' since they work in libraries. Their first task is to look for what used to be called 'parallels,' similar social features appearing in different societies, in the present or in the past. At Cambridge sixty years ago Frazer represented arm-chair anthropology using the comparative method, while Haddon urged the need of 'intensive' studies of particular societies by systematic field studies of competent observers. The development of field studies has led to a relative neglect of studies making use of the comparative method. This is both understandable and excusable, but it does have some regrettable effects. The student is told that he must consider any feature of social life in its context, in its relation to the other features of the particular social system in which it is found. But he is often not taught to look at it in the wider context of human societies in general. The teaching of the Cambridge school of anthropology forty-five years ago was not that arm-chair anthropology was to be abandoned but that it must be combined with intensive studies of particular primitive societies in which any particular institution, custom, or belief of the society should be examined in relation

to the total social system of which it was a part or item. Without systematic comparative studies anthropology will become only historiography and ethnography. Sociological theory must be based on, and continually tested by, systematic comparison.

The only really satisfactory way of explaining a method is by means of illustration. Let us therefore consider how the method can be applied in a particular instance. We may take our start with a particular feature of some tribes in the interior of New South Wales. In these tribes there is a division of the population into two parts, which are named after the eaglehawk and the crow (Kilpara and Makwara). There is a rule by which a man should only take a wife from the division other than his own, and that the children will belong to the same division as their mother. The system is described in technical terms as one of totemically represented exogamous matrilineal moieties.

One way of explaining why a particular society has the features that it does have is by its history. As we have no authentic history of these or other Australian tribes the historical anthropologists are reduced to offering us imaginary histories. Thus the Rev. John Mathew would explain these divisions and their names by supposing that two different peoples, one called Eaglehawks and the other Crows, met in this part of Australia and fought with each other. Ultimately they decided to make peace and agreed that in future Eaglehawk men would only marry Crow women and *vice versa*.

Let us begin looking for parallels. There is a very close parallel to be found amongst the Haida of north-west America, who also have a division into two exogamous matrilineal moieties which are named after the eagle and the raven, two species which correspond very closely indeed to the eaglehawk and crow of Australia. The Haida have a legend that in the beginning only the eagle possessed fresh water which he kept in a basket. The raven discovered this and succeeded in stealing the water from the eagle. But as he flew with the basket over Queen Charlotte Island the water was spilled from the heavy basket and formed the lakes and rivers from which all birds can now drink; and salmon made their way into the streams and now furnish food for men.

In some parts of Australia there are similar legends about the eaglehawk and the crow. One is to the effect that in the beginning only the eaglehawk possessed a supply of fresh water, which he kept under a large stone. The crow, spying on him, saw him

lift the stone and take a drink, then replace the stone. The crow proceeded to lift the stone, and after he had taken a drink of fresh water scratched the lice from his head into the water and did not replace the stone. The result was that the water escaped and formed the rivers of eastern Australia in which the lice became the Murray cod that were an important item of food for the aborigines just as salmon are in north-west America. If we accept the criteria formulated by the diffusionists, such as Graebner, we have here what they would say is evidence of a historical connection between Australia and the Pacific coast of North America.

Once we begin looking for parallels to the eaglehawk-crow division of Australia we find many instances of exogamous moieties, in some instances matrilineal, in others patrilineal, in the rest of Australia, and frequently the divisions are named after or represented by birds. In Victoria we find black cockatoo and white cockatoo, in Western Australia white cockatoo and crow. In New Ireland there is a similar system in which the moieties are associated with the sea-eagle and the fish-hawk. At this point we may feel inclined to ask why these social divisions should be identified by reference to two species of birds.

In Eastern Australia the division of the population into two sexes is represented by what is called sex totemism. In tribes of New South Wales the men have for their 'brother' the bat, and the women have for their 'sister' the night owl in some tribes and the owl nightjar in others. In the northern part of New South Wales the totems are the bat for men and the tree-creeper for women. (It must be remembered that the Australian aborigines classify the bat as a 'bird.') So we find another dichotomy of society in which the divisions are represented by birds.

Throughout most of Australia there is a very important social division into two alternating generation divisions or endogamous moieties. One division consists of all the persons of a single generation together with those of the generation of their grandparents and the generation of their grandchildren, while the other division includes all those of the generation of their parents and the generation of their children. These divisions are rarely given names but in some tribes may be referred to by terms, one of which a man applies to his own division and its members while the other is applied to the other division. But in one part of Western Australia these endogamous moieties are named after the kingfisher

and the bee-eater, while in another part they are named after a little red bird and a little black bird.

Our question "Why all these birds?" is thus widened in its scope. It is not only the exogamous moieties, but also dual divisions of other kinds that are identified by connection with a pair of birds. It is, however, not always a question of birds. In Australia the moieties may be associated with other pairs of animals, with two species of kangaroo in one part, with two species of bee in another. In California one moiety is associated with the coyote and the other with the wild cat.

Our collection of parallels could be extended to other instances in which a social group or division is given an identity and distinguished from others by association with a natural species. The Australian moieties are merely one instance of a widely spread social phenomenon. From the particular phenomenon we are led, by the comparative method, to a much more general problem—How can we understand the customs by which social groups and divisions are distinguished by associating a particular group or division with a particular natural species? This is the general problem of totemism, as it has been designated. I do not offer you a solution of this problem, as it seems to me to be the resultant of two other problems. One is the problem of the way in which in a particular society the relation of human beings to natural species is represented, and as a contribution to this problem I have offered an analysis of the non-totemic Andaman Islanders. The other is the problem of how social groups come to be identified by connection with some emblem, symbol, or object having symbolic or emblematic reference. A nation identified by its flag, a family identified by its coat of arms, a particular congregation of a church identified by its relation to a particular saint, a clan identified by its relation to a totemic species; these are all so many examples of a single class of phenomena for which we have to look for a general theory.

The problem to which it is desired to draw your attention here is a different one. Granted that it is for some reason appropriate to identify social divisions by association with natural species, what is the principle by which such pairs as eaglehawk and crow, eagle and raven, coyote and wild cat are chosen as representing the moieties of a dual division? The reason for asking this question is not idle curiosity. We may, it can be held, suppose that an understanding of the principle in question will give us an important insight into the way in which the natives themselves think about the dual division as a part of their social

structure. In other words, instead of asking "Why all these birds?" we can ask "Why particularly eaglehawk and crow, and other pairs?"

I have collected many tales about Eaglehawk and Crow in different parts of Australia, and in all of them the two are represented as opponents in some sort of conflict. A single example must suffice and it comes from Western Australia. Eaglehawk was the mother's brother of Crow. In these tribes a man marries the daughter of a mother's brother so that Eaglehawk was the possible father-in-law of Crow, to whom therefore he owed obligations such as that of providing him with food. Eaglehawk told his nephew to go and hunt wallaby. Crow, having killed a wallaby, ate it himself, an extremely reprehensible action in terms of native morality. On his return to the camp his uncle asked him what he had brought, and Crow, being a liar, said that he had succeeded in getting nothing. Eaglehawk then said, "But what is in your belly, since your hunger-belt is no longer tight?" Crow replied that to stay the pangs of hunger he had filled his belly with the gum from the acacia. The uncle replied that he did not believe him and would tickle him until he vomited. (This incident is given in the legend in the form of a song of Eaglehawk—*Balmanangabalu ngabarina, kidji-kidji malidyala*.) The crow vomited the wallaby that he had eaten. Thereupon Eaglehawk seized him and rolled him in the fire; his eyes became red with the fire, he was blackened by the charcoal, and he called out in pain "Wa! Wa! Wa!" Eaglehawk pronounced what was to be the law "You will never be a hunter, but you will for ever be a thief." And that is how things now are.

To interpret this tale we have to consider how these birds appear to the aborigines. In the first place they are the two chief meat-eating birds and the Australian aborigine thinks of himself as a meat-eater. One method of hunting in this region is for a number of men and women to come together at an appropriate season for a collective hunt. A fire across a stretch of country is started in such a way that it will be spread by the wind. The men advance in front of the fire killing with spear or throwing stick the animals that are fleeing from it, while the women follow the fire to dig out such animals as bandicoots that have taken refuge underground. When such a hunt has been started it will not be long before first one and then another eaglehawk makes its appearance to join in the hunting of the animals in flight from the advancing flames. Eaglehawk is the hunter.

The crow does not join in this or any other kind of hunt, but when a camp fire is started it is rarely very long before a crow makes his appearance to settle in a tree out of reach of a throwing stick and wait for the chance of thieving a piece of meat for his dinner.

Amongst the tales told by the Australians about animals we can find an immense number of parallels to this tale of Eaglehawk and Crow. Here, as an example, is one about the wombat and the kangaroo from the region where South Australia adjoins Victoria. In this region the wombat and the kangaroo are the two largest meat animals. In the beginning Wombat and Kangaroo lived together as friends. One day Wombat began to make a 'house' for himself. (The wombat lives in a burrow in the ground.) Kangaroo jeered at him and thus annoyed him. Then one day it rained. (It is to be remembered that in these tales whatever happens is thought of as happening for the first time in the history of the world.) Wombat went into his 'house' out of the rain. Kangaroo asked Wombat to make room for him, but the latter explained that there was only room for one. Thus Wombat and Kangaroo quarrelled and fought. Kangaroo hit Wombat on the head with a big stone, flattening his skull; Wombat threw a spear at Kangaroo which fixed itself at the base of the backbone. The wombat has a flattened skull to this day and the kangaroo has a tail; the former lives in a burrow while the kangaroo lives in the open; they are no longer friends.

This is, of course, a 'just-so' story which you may think is childish. It amuses the listeners when it is told with the suitable dramatic expressions. But if we examine some dozens of these tales we find that they have a single theme. The resemblances and differences of animal species are translated into terms of friendship and conflict, solidarity and opposition. In other words the world of animal life is represented in terms of social relations similar to those of human society.

One may find legends which relate not to particular species or pairs of species but to animals in general. There is a legend in New South Wales according to which in the beginning all the animals formed a single society. Then the bat was responsible for introducing death into the world by killing his two wives. His brothers-in-law called all the animals to a corroboree, and catching the bat unawares threw him into the fire. This started a general fight in which the animals attacked each other with fire, and of this fight all the animals now show the marks.

The various species no longer form one society of friends.

There is a very similar tale in the Andaman Islands. The various species of animals originally formed a single society. At a meeting one of them brought fire. There was a general quarrel in which they all threw fire at each other. Some fled into the sea and became fishes, others escaped into the trees and became birds, and birds and fishes still show the marks of the burns they suffered.

A comparative study therefore reveals to us the fact that the Australian ideas about the eaglehawk and the crow are only a particular instance of a widespread phenomenon. First, these tales interpret the resemblances and differences of animal species in terms of social relationships of friendship and antagonism as they are known in the social life of human beings. Secondly, natural species are placed in pairs of opposites. They can only be so regarded if there is some respect in which they resemble each other. Thus eaglehawk and crow resemble each other in being the two prominent meat-eating birds. When I first investigated the sex totems of New South Wales I supposed, quite wrongly, that what was the basic resemblance of the bat and the night owl or nightjar was that they both fly about at night. But the tree-creeper does not fly at night and is the totem of the women in the northern part of New South Wales. As I was sitting in the region of the Macleay River with a native a tree-creeper made its appearance, and I asked him to tell me about it. "That is the bird that taught women how to climb trees" he told me. After some conversation I asked "What resemblance is there between the bat and the tree-creeper?" and with an expression on his face that showed surprise that I should ask such a question he replied, "But of course they both live in holes in trees." I realised that the night owl and the nightjar also live in trees. The fact that certain animals eat meat constitutes a sort of social similarity, as of eaglehawk and crow or dingo and wild cat. Similarly the habit of living in holes in trees.

We can now answer the question "Why eaglehawk and crow?" by saying that these are selected as representing a certain kind of relationship which we may call one of 'opposition'.

The Australian idea of what is here called 'opposition' is a particular application of that association by contrariety that is a universal feature of human thinking, so that we think by pairs of contraries, upwards and downwards, strong and weak, black and white. But the Australian conception of 'opposition'

combines the idea of a pair of contraries with that of a pair of opponents. In the tales about eaglehawk and crow the two birds are opponents in the sense of being antagonists. They are also contraries by reason of their difference of character, Eaglehawk the hunter, Crow the thief. Black cockatoo and white cockatoo which represent the moieties in Western Victoria are another example of contrariety, the birds being essentially similar except for the contrast of colour. In America the moieties are referred to by other pairs of contraries, Heaven and Earth, war and peace, up-stream and down-stream, red and white. After a lengthy comparative study I think I am fully justified in stating a general law, that wherever, in Australia, Melanesia or America, there exists a social structure of exogamous moieties, the moieties are thought of as being in a relation of what is here called 'opposition'.

Obviously the next step in a comparative study is to attempt to discover what are the various forms that the opposition between the moieties of a dual division takes in actual social life. In the literature there are occasional references to a certain hostility between the two divisions described as existing or reported to have existed in the past. All the available evidence is that there is no real hostility in the proper sense of the term but only a conventional attitude which finds expression in some customary mode of behaviour. Certainly in Australia, although in some instances where there is a dispute it is possible to observe the members of the two patrilineal moieties forming separate 'sides', real hostility, of the kind that may lead to violent action is not between the moieties but between local groups, and two local groups of the same patrilineal moiety seem to be just as frequently in conflict as two groups belonging to different moieties. Indeed, since a common source of actual conflict is the taking by one man of a woman married to or betrothed to another the two antagonists or groups of antagonists in such instances will both belong to the same patrilineal moiety.

The expression of opposition between the moieties may take various forms. One is the institution to which anthropologists have given the not very satisfactory name of 'the joking relationship.' Members of opposite divisions are permitted or expected to indulge in teasing each other, in verbal abuse or in exchange of insults. Kroeber (*Handbook of Indians of California*) writes that amongst the Cupeño "a sort of good natured opposition is recognized between the moieties, whose members frequently taunt each other with being unsteady and slow-witted,

respectively." Strong (*Aboriginal Society in Southern California*) reports the same thing. "A good-natured antagonism between the moieties exhibits itself in joking between persons of the one and the other. The coyote people taunt the wild cat people with being slow-witted and lazy like their animal representative and the wild cat people retaliate by accusing their opponents with being unsteady. There are indications that this teasing of one moiety by another entered into their serious ceremonies. There were songs of a satirical kind that could be sung by one moiety against the other. However, the opposition between the moieties seems to have been much less strong than between certain pairs of clans, sometimes belonging to the same moiety, which were traditionally 'enemies.' These clans, on certain occasions would sing 'enemy songs' against each other."

This institution, for which it is to be hoped that some one will find a better name than 'joking relationship,' is found in a variety of forms in a number of different societies, and calls for systematic comparative study. It has for its function to maintain a continuous relationship between two persons, or two groups, of apparent but factitious hostility or antagonism. I have offered a suggestion towards a comparative study of this institution in a paper published in the journal *Africa*.

Another significant custom in which is expressed the relation of opposition between the two moieties is that by which, in some tribes of Australia and in some of North America the moieties provide the 'sides' in games such as football. Competitive games provide a social occasion on which two persons or two groups of persons are opponents. Two continuing groups in a social structure can be maintained in a relation in which they are regularly opponents. An example is provided by the two universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

There are other customs in which the opposition of moieties is expressed. For example, in the Omaha tribe of North America the camp circle was divided into two semi-circles, and when a boy of the one half crossed into the other he took companions with him and there was a fight with the boys of the other moiety. We need not and can not here examine these various customs.

Let us consider briefly the institution of moiety exogamy, by which every marriage, where the rule is observed, is between persons belonging to opposite moieties. There are innumerable customs which show that in many primitive societies the taking of a woman in marriage is represented symbolically as an act of

hostility against her family or group. Every anthropologist is familiar with the custom by which it is represented that the bride is captured or taken by force from her kinsfolk. A first collection of instances of this custom was made by McLennan, who interpreted them historically as being survivals from the earliest condition of human society in which the only way to obtain a wife was to steal or capture a woman from another tribe.

An illuminating example of this kind of custom is provided by the people of the Marquesas. When a marriage has been arranged the kinsmen of the bridegroom take the gifts which are to be offered to the kinsfolk of the bride and proceed towards the bride's home. On the way they are ambushed and attacked by the bride's kin who seize by force the goods that they are conveying. The first act of violence comes from the kin of the bride. By the Polynesian principle of *utu* those who suffer an injury are entitled to retaliate by inflicting an injury. So the bridegroom's kinsmen exercise this right by carrying off the bride. No example could better illustrate the fact that these customary actions are symbolic.

Viewed in relation to social structure the meaning or symbolic reference of these customs ought to be obvious. The solidarity of a group requires that the loss of one of its members shall be recognized as an injury to the group. Some expression of this is therefore called for. The taking of a woman in marriage is represented as in some sense an act of hostility against her kin. This is what is meant by the saying of the Gusii of East Africa "Those whom we marry are those whom we fight."

It is in the light of this that we must interpret the custom of marriage by exchange. The group or kin of a woman lose her when she marries; they are compensated for their loss if they receive another who will become the wife of one of them. In Australian tribes, with a few exceptions, the custom is that when a man takes a wife he should give a sister to replace her. In the Yaralde tribe of South Australia, which did not have a system of moieties, when a man married a woman of another local clan, his own clan was expected to provide a wife for some member of the clan from which the bride came. Otherwise the marriage was regarded as irregular, improper, or we might almost say illegal. It has been reported from the tribes of the eastern part of Victoria (Gippsland) that the only proper form of marriage was by exchange. The system of exogamous moieties provides a system of generalisation of marriage by exchange, since every

marriage is one incident in the continual process by which the men of one moiety get their wives from the other.

A comparative study shows that in many primitive societies the relation established between two groups of kin by a marriage between a man of one group and a woman of the other is one which is expressed by customs of avoidance and by the joking relationship. In many societies a man is required to avoid any close social contact with the mother of his wife, frequently also with her father, and with other persons of that generation amongst his wife's kin. With this custom there is frequently associated the custom called the 'joking relationship' by which a man is permitted or even required to use insulting behaviour to some of his wife's kin of his own generation. I have elsewhere suggested that these customs can be understood as being the conventional means by which a relationship of a peculiar kind, which can be described as a compound of friendship or solidarity with hostility or opposition is established and maintained.

In a complete study there are other features of the dual organization that would need to be taken into consideration. There are instances in which there are regular exchanges of goods or services between the two moieties. In that competitive exchange of food and valuables known as 'potlatch' in North America, the moieties may be significant. Amongst the Tlingit, for example, it is members of one moiety who potlatch against members of the other moiety. The two moieties provide the 'sides' for what is a sort of competitive game in which men 'fight with property.'

Our comparative study enables us to see the eagle-hawk-crow division of the Darling River tribes as one particular example of a widespread type of the application of a certain structural principle. The relation between the two divisions, which has here been spoken of by the term 'opposition' is one which separates and also unites, and which therefore gives us a rather special kind of social integration which deserves systematic study. But the term 'opposition' which I have been obliged to use because I cannot find a better, is not wholly appropriate, for it stresses too much what is only one side of the relationship, that of separation and difference. The more correct description would be to say that the kind of structure with which we are concerned is one of the union of opposites.

The idea of a unity of contraries was one of the leading ideas of the philosophy of Heraclitus. It is summed up in his statement, "Polemos is king, rules all things." The Greek word *polemos* is sometimes

translated as 'strife,' but the appropriate translation would be 'opposition' in the sense in which that word has been used in this lecture. Heraclitus uses as one example the mortise and the tenon; these are not at strife; they are contraries or opposites which combine to make a unity when they are joined together.

There is some evidence that this idea of the union of opposites was derived by Heraclitus and the Pythagoreans from the East. At any rate the most complete elaboration of the idea is to be found in the Yin-Yang philosophy of ancient China. The phrase in which this is summed up is "*Yi yin yi yang wei tze tao.*" One yin and one yang make an order. Yin is the feminine principle, Yang the masculine. The word 'tao' can here be best translated as 'an ordered whole.' One man (yang) and his wife (yin) constitute the unity of a married couple. One day (yang) and one night (yin) make a unified whole or unity of time. Similarly one summer (yang) and one winter (yin) make up the unity we call a year. Activity is yang and passivity is yin and a relation of two entities or persons of which one is active and the other passive is also conceived as a unity of opposites. In this ancient Chinese philosophy this idea of the unity of opposites is given the widest possible extension. The whole universe including human society is interpreted as an 'order' based on this.

There is historical evidence that this philosophy was developed many centuries ago in the region of the Yellow River, the 'Middle Kingdom.' There is also evidence that the social organization of this region was one of paired intermarrying clans, the two clans meeting together at the Spring and Autumn Festivals, and competing in the singing of odes, so that the men of the one clan could find wives amongst the daughters of the other. The evidence is that the system of marriage was one where a man married his mother's brother's daughter, or a woman of the appropriate generation of his mother's clan. According to my information this kind of organization, which apparently existed forty centuries ago in that region, still survived there in 1935, but the investigation of it that I had planned to be carried out by Li Yu I was unfortunately prevented by the Japanese attack on China. It may still not be too late for this to be done; it would enable us to evaluate more exactly the historical reconstruction of Marcel Granet.

This Yin-Yang philosophy of ancient China is the systematic elaboration of the principle that can be used to define the social structure of moieties in Australian tribes, for the structure of moieties is, as may be seen from the brief account here given, one

of a unity of opposing groups, in the double sense that the two groups are friendly opponents, and that they are represented as being in some sense opposites, in the way in which eaglehawk and crow or black and white are opposites.

Light can be thrown on this by the consideration of another instance of opposition in Australian societies. An Australian camp includes men of a certain local clan and their wives who, by the rule of exogamy, have come from other clans. In New South Wales there is a system of sex totemism, by which one animal species is the 'brother' of the men, and another species is the 'sister' of the women. Occasionally there arises within a native camp a condition of tension between the sexes. What is then likely to happen, according to the accounts of the aborigines, is that the women will go out and kill a bat, the 'brother' or sex totem of the men, and leave it lying in the camp for the men to see. The men then retaliate by killing the bird which in that tribe is the sex totem of the women. The women then utter abuse against the men and this leads to a fight with sticks (digging sticks for the women, throwing sticks for the men) between the two sex groups in which a good many bruises are inflicted. After the fight peace is restored and the tension is eliminated. The Australian aborigines have the idea that where there is a quarrel between two persons or two groups which is likely to smoulder the thing to do is for them to fight it out and then make friends. The symbolic use of the totem is very significant. This custom shows us that the idea of the opposition of groups, and the union of opposites is not confined to the exogamous moieties. The two sex groups provide a structure of a similar kind; so sometimes do the two groups formed by the alternating generation divisions. The group of the fathers, and the group of their sons are in a relation of opposition, not dissimilar from the relation between husbands and their wives.

We can say that in the relatively simple social structure of Australian tribes we can recognize three principal types of relationship between persons or groups. There is the relationship of enmity and strife; at the other extreme there is the relationship of simple solidarity, and in the Australian system this ought to exist between brothers, and between persons of the same generation in the local group; such persons may not fight, though in certain circumstances it is thought to be legitimate for one person to 'growl' against the other, to express in the camp a complaint against the action of the other. There is thirdly the relationship of opposition, which is not at all the

same thing as strife or enmity, but is a combination of agreement and disagreement, of solidarity and difference.

We began with a particular feature of a particular region in Australia, the existence of exogamous moieties named after the eaglehawk and the crow. By making comparisons amongst other societies, some of them not Australian, we are enabled to see that this is not something particular or peculiar to one region, but is one instance of certain widespread general tendencies in human societies. We thus substitute for a particular problem of the kind that calls for a historical explanation, certain general problems. There is, for example, the problem of totemism as a social phenomenon in which there is a special association of a social group with a natural species. Another, and perhaps more important, problem that has been raised, is that of the nature and functioning of social relationships and social structures based on what has here been called 'opposition.' This is a much more general problem than that of totemism for it is the problem of how opposition can be used as a mode of social integration. The comparative method is therefore one by which we pass from the particular to the general, from the general to the more general, with the end in view that we may in this way arrive at the universal, at characteristics which can be found in different forms in all human societies.

But the comparative method does not only formulate problems, though the formulation of the right problems is extremely important in any science; it also provides material by which the first steps may be made towards the solution. A study of the system of moieties in Australia can give us results that should have considerable value for the theory of human society.

At the beginning of this lecture I quoted Franz Boas as having distinguished two tasks with which an anthropologist can concern himself in the study of primitive society, and these two tasks call for two different methods. One is the 'historical' method, by which the existence of a particular feature in a particular society is 'explained' as the result of a particular sequence of events. The other is the comparative method by which we seek, not to 'explain,' but to understand a particular feature of a particular society by first seeing it as a particular instance of a general kind or class of social phenomena, and then by relating it to a certain general, or preferably a universal, tendency in human societies. Such a tendency is what is called in certain instances a law. Anthropology as the study of primitive society

includes both methods, and I have myself consistently used both in the teaching of ethnology and social anthropology in a number of universities. But there must be discrimination. The historical method will give us particular propositions, only the comparative method can give us general propositions. In primitive societies historical evidence is always lacking or inadequate. There is no historical evidence as to how the eaglehawk-crow division in Australia came into existence, and guesses about it seem to me of no significance whatever. How the Australian aborigines arrived at their present social systems is, and forever must be, entirely unknown. The supposition that by the comparative method we might arrive at valid conclusions about the 'origins' of those systems shows a complete disregard for the nature of historical evidence. Anthropology, as the study of primitive societies, includes both historical (ethnographical and ethnological) studies and also the generalizing study known as social anthropology which is a special branch of comparative sociology. It is desirable that the aims and methods should be distinguished. History, in the proper sense of the term, as an authentic account of the succession of events in a particular region over a particular period of time, cannot give us generalizations. The comparative method as a generalising study of the features of human societies cannot give us particular histories. The two studies can only be combined and adjusted when their difference is properly recognized and it is for this reason that thirty years ago I urged that there should be a clear distinction between ethnology as the historical study of primitive societies and social anthropology as that branch of comparative sociology that concerns itself specially with the societies we call primitive. We can leave all questions of historical reconstruction to ethnology. For social anthropology the task is to formulate and validate statements about the conditions of existence of social systems (laws of social statics) and the regularities that are observable in social change (laws of social dynamics). This can only be done by the systematic use of the comparative method, and the only justification of that method is the expectation that it will provide us with results of this kind, or, as Boas stated it, will provide us with knowledge of the laws of social development. It will be only in an integrated and organized study in which historical studies and sociological studies are combined that we shall be able to reach a real understanding of the development of human society, and this we do not yet have.