Folklorists had been rediscovering the "Parry–Lord hypothesis" regarding the oral-performative composition of the Homeric epics (M. Parry 1971; Lord 1960), launching what was to become an intense interest in the nature and significance of oral poetry globally (Finnegan 1977) and in the idea of verbal art as performance (Bauman 1977). The theoretical significance of the latter emphasis is that it is particularly in oral performances that cultural processes can be observed in which meaning and form are constituted (Caton 1990; Bauman & Briggs 1990).

Another important influence on the development of ethnopoetics was the ethnography of communication, which came to prominence in the 1960s (Hymes 1974). Ethnopoetics emerged and quickly established itself at the forefront of this subdiscipline with work such as Hymes's (1981) study of Native American literature of Northwest Coast and recent work in this vein by Sherzer (1990) on the Kuna of Panama. Dennis Tedlock's critical interventions encapsulated an important argument against what he called (after Derrida) the "logocentric" bias of LINGUISTICS in translation and transcription as exemplified, or so he claimed, in the work of Hymes and other ethnographers of communication (Tedlock 1983). He called for a new way of understanding and rendering oral art forms based upon a "dialogical" or Bakhtinian model of discourse (Bakhtin 1981). Of course, these approaches need not be mutually exclusive and they have both stimulated lively interest in problems of representing sound and meaning in cultural context.

Finally, poets, particularly in the United States over the past few decades, have stimulated ethnopoetics by researching other literary traditions as well as borrowing from them to create their own distinctive works, as is evident, for example, in the poetry of Olson, Snyder, and Baraka. Conversely, anthropologists have started to read their own poetry in public academic settings as a way of representing ethnography in new modes, thereby challenging the boundary between academic and artistic discourses, as happened in a session organized by Stanley Diamond at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in December 1982. Related, then, to ethnopoetics but arising as a distinctive practice is what is sometimes called "anthropological poetics," which has more to do with the role of poetics and even poetry in informing anthropological theory and representational practice (Brady 1991), or with serving as a vehicle for the communication of ethnography (S. Diamond 1986), than it has with the study of "native" systems of poetics per se. It may well happen in the not too distant future that these strands will be interwoven into a more general field simply called "anthropology and poetics." SC

See also COMMUNICATION

further reading Richard Brown 1977; J. Fernandez 1986; Friedrich 1986; J. Weiner 1991

political anthropology devotes itself to the study of law, order, conflict, governance, and power. Its origins are grounded in concepts drawn from such nineteenth-century theorists of social evolution as Sir Henry MAINE (1861), who distinguished societies organized by status and by contract in LAW, and Lewis Henry MORGAN's (1877) distinction between kinship and territory as the basis for the organization of GOVERNMENT. In addition it owes much to the discussions about the relationships between moral order and SOCIAL ORGANIZATION found in the writings of Emile DURKHEIM (1933), Max WEBER (1968), and Karl Marx (1887). More recent infusions of theory have come from social scientists such as Michel Foucault (1977b), Pierre Bourdieu (1977), and Anthony Giddens (1984), who focus on the structure of POWER in society.

Political anthropology today is the product of two different legacies. The first, primarily associated with cultural anthropology in the United States, remained focused on the comparative and historical questions of how and why political systems evolved. The second, associated with British social anthropology, was more interested in how politics worked in different societies and the roles of individuals.

The rise of the state has long been of theoretical interest to anthropologists intrigued by the evolution of societal forms. For decades evolution-minded anthropologists, along with archeologists, have busily classified societies into categories such as BANDS, TRIBES, CHIEFDOMS, and STATES, and then debated the merits of one another's typologies (Fried 1967; Service 1975). Conflict is often accorded a central if not catalytic role in virtually all these schemas. Yet though WAR has traditionally been studied as a means to an evolutionary end (Otterbein 1970), it has only recently been studied as an institution in and of itself (Turney-High 1949; R. Ferguson 1995; Otterbein 1994). This new focus on VIOLENCE in the contemporary world has made this branch of political anthropology much more salient than in the past. For example, although the FEUD (as a form of containable conflict) was one of the first political institutions to be studied, only recently have the uncontainable effects (and not just the causes) of organized violence in their various ethnic, political, sectarian, religious, and economic manifestations become subjects of research by anthropologists (Nordstrom & Martin 1992), along with possible solutions such as mediation and CONFLICT RESOLUTION.

The second, and perhaps more influential, branch of political anthropology has its origins in the experience of anthropological FIELDWORK and the very practical concerns associated with locating order in non-Western societies. This was the explicit aim of the founding work in the field, *African political systems* (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1940b). Based on a set of descriptions and analyses of centralized and decentralized systems of governance in Africa, societies were divided into two types: "primitive states" that possessed government institutions and "stateless societies" that did not. This work, and examples of detailed fieldwork on political systems such as EVANS-PRITCHARD's (1940) among the Nuer and FORTES's (1945) among the Tallensi, inspired a generation of fieldworkers to concentrate on the varied ways in which political order might be embedded in KINSHIP relations, RITUAL practices, AGE SYSTEMS, and other order-keeping institutions that did not require separate institutions of government. Such a focus was of clear concern to colonial administrators anxious to understand how to govern and control "subject" peoples, and the role anthropologists may have played in aiding COLONIALISM has been the subject of considerable debate in recent decades (Asad 1973; Kuklik 1991). It is clear, however, that the results of such work, particularly in Africa, pushed anthropology in a number of new directions.

One such area was the question of conflict and conflict resolution which became the focus of the so-called Manchester school. Pioneered by the work of Max GLUCKMAN and his students, it encouraged anthropologists to study social mechanisms for coping with intersocietal tension and change. Gluckman, trained in both law and anthropology, also contributed heavily to the development of LEGAL ANTHROPOLOGY, which has always been closely linked with political anthropology because of a shared interest in conflict mediation and the maintenance of social order. Confronting anticolonial stirrings but still-firm color lines after World War II, Manchester school anthropologists experimented with new methodologies, including situational analyses (Velsen 1967) and network analysis (J. Mitchell 1969), to explain how seemingly apolitical events and organizations could in fact be laced with political meaning. Other scholars found that politics were embedded in all aspects of social life, including RITUAL. For instance, Victor TURNER (1957) described how village-level political crises were ritually solved by Ndembu in Zambia, and Abner Cohen (1969) unraveled ritual's political role in the development of Hausa ethnicity in a Yorubaland town in Nigeria.

Political anthropology, however, was not confined to Africa or the Manchester school. Edmund LEACH (1954) examined the connection between ritual, identity, and ethnicity among the Kachin of Burma in terms of an oscillating political system that regularly shifted between ranked and egalitarian forms of social organization (GUMSA AND GUMLAO). Leach's suggestions about the role of individual AGENCY in politics were followed up by F. G. Bailey (1960) in India and Fredrik Barth (1959a) among the Swat Pathans to

explore the aggregate effects of political maneuvering.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the role of bigman networks, patron-client relations, peasantries, and elites became a focus of research. Borrowing from game theory, political anthropologists continued to analyze contests over status, prestige, and power in a wide range of arenas. In the 1980s developments in political economy and WORLD-SYSTEM THEORY introduced new comparative possibilities for analyzing political transformations and CLASS relations in truly global terms (E. Wolf 1982; Mintz 1985).

In addition to developing large-scale models to explain political systems, anthropologists have also focused more narrowly on understanding the strategies individuals and societies use to resist penetration by such external forces as capitalism, centralized state authority, and hegemonic authority. In seeking to explain how groups of all kinds resist, but also at times collude with, authority or the state, political anthropologists have utilized both top-down and bottom-up approaches to understanding power. Increasingly, this research has shifted from well-bounded and static units such as territorial states or formal political institutions to such political categories of people as refugees and to political and economic processes created by development projects and multinational corporations.

If earlier political anthropologists dealt with individual cases that were most often foreign and remote, current research strives to be both comparative and inclusive by using non-Western variants to probe Western practices of long-standing interest to political scientists such as SUCCESSION to high office (J. Goody 1966). For example, David Kertzer (1988) dissected political rites in Italy, the United States, and the Soviet Union, along with the Aztec, Bunyoro, and Swazi. This is exactly in keeping with the earliest aims of political anthropology. It has given the field a renewed vitality to go beyond questions of governmental institutions and the ability to cope with new issues of order, disorder, and projections of power that will shape the parameters of research in the future.

AS

further reading Balandier 1970; Lewellen 1992; Vincent 1990

pollution *See* PURITY/POLLUTION

polyandry is a form of plural marriage allowing a woman to have more than one husband at a time, or conversely for men to share a single wife. It almost always takes the form of **fraternal polyandry** in which a group of brothers share a wife. MR

See also POLYGYNY

further reading Levine 1983

polygamy is the institution of plural marriage that permits individuals to have more than one spouse. It encompasses both POLYANDRY and POLYGYNY. MR

polygyny is a form of plural marriage allowing a man to have more than one wife at one time. MR

See also POLYANDRY

polytheism is the worship or recognition of many gods or spirits in a religious universe. The nineteenth century saw the rise of two main evolutionary ideas that lay behind definitions of polytheism (H. Spencer 1876; Tylor 1871). First, it was proposed that prehistoric peoples eventually came to distinguish between the material body and the soul or spirit, so fostering beliefs in a plurality of SPIRITS. Not only people, but also animals, plants, and inanimate objects might be credited with souls (see ANIMISM). Second, worship of the souls of ANCESTORS was put forward as the origin of RELIGION, with the further belief that such ancestral ghosts were sometimes manifested in totems. For DURKHEIM (1915), TOTEMISM, involving a plethora of collective and individual or personal totemic spirits, was at the origin of all religions. Opinion differed as to whether polytheism preceded MONOTHEISM, with most evolutionists, such as TYLOR and SPENCER, contending that it did.

A question arises as to whether all religions are in reality always to some degree polytheistic. There are two responses to this. First, although a High God or principal deity may well characterize a religion, which may therefore be defined as monotheistic, there may be well be a belief in the coexistence of demons, Satan, and impersonal as well as personified manifestations of EVIL. These are clearly not benign entities in the normal sense conveyed by the term "god," but they clearly are spiritual beings and so, in Tylor's definition, part of the basis of religious belief.

Second, it is often the case that a High God surmounts a hierarchy of lesser deities or godlike beings. In Christianity, God may communicate his will to mortals through spirits called "angels" (not all of whom are benevolent), who constitute a celestial hierarchy, with archangels occupying the eighth rank. A comparable situation exists within the other so-called Semitic religions of Judaism and Islam, despite an awareness of the danger of deities (and Satan) competing with God, which may provoke denunciation of the worship of other gods and idols.

Among many Muslims today, this denunciation of polytheism is at the basis of a radical fundamentalist Islam, which urges people to desist from venerating dead saints (and even the Prophet himself) in lavish rituals, and from seeking mystical supplication from spirits or *jinns*, despite the fact that some of these are mentioned, sometimes approvingly, in the Qur'an.

Hinduism, particularly as it is practiced locally, contains a divine hierarchy, from God as pervasive and unembodied, to deities that are embodied widely, such as Shiva, Parvati and Vishnu, to various regional gods, to local deities that protect villagers from evil gods, and finally to local deities that protect villagers from evil demons. Local forms of Buddhism involve the worship of and sacrifice to local deities, who have the power to cure and bring good fortune to mortal.

It is a short step from supplication to local deities to what is known as spirit possession, mediumship, and SHAMANISM, in which persons are much more likely to be in direct contact with local or lesser deities than with a High God. Spirit possession is the involuntary seizure of a person's mind and body by a spirit that enters him or her. Spirit mediums are involuntarily possessed by spirits that talk through the medium and can divine causes of misfortune, read the future or facilitate communication with the dead. Shamans are specialists who actually control at will their own possessory spirits in order to provide these services (I. Lewis 1971; Riches 1994). Such instances can also be covered by the term "polytheism," with a dominant god or gods often much less significant in the everyday lives of worshipers.

Finally, a number of religions, perhaps most to some degree, have a notion of immanent and sometimes transcendent divinity. EVANS-PRITCHARD (1956) described God among the Nuer of Sudan as existing both in a transcendental exalted state and as refractions located as spirits or in various features of the natural environment. It is almost inevitable that immanent divinities will be reflected in this way. Polytheism may, then, be a shorthand term used to refer to a variety of conceptions of divinity within or unrelated to a hierarchy of spiritual beings. DP

further reading Ahern 1981; Babb 1975; Firth 1940; James 1979; Lienhardt 1961; Tambiah 1970

population *See* DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION, DEMOGRAPHY

possession *See* TRANCE

postcolonialism is a critical, interdisciplinary tradition that explores the impact of colonial power on the cultures of colonizing and colonized peoples in the past, and the reproduction of colonial relations, representations, and practices in the present.

Postcolonialism had its origins in the humanities, especially in literary and cultural studies, where it received its most decisive impetus from Edward Said's (1978) seminal critique of Orientalism. This text depended on a tense conjunction of humanism and antihumanism to expose the forms through which European and North American representations of "the Orient" had been produced and circulated, but the subsequent development of postcolonialism has been much more critical of Western humanism and has involved a much closer engagement with poststructuralism, especially the work of