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LAW, POWER, AND THE STATE – THINKING BEYOND THE TEXT

Readings:

- **Fernanda Pirie**, *The Anthropology of Law* (Chapter 8)
- **Begoña Aretxaga**, *Maddening States*

Objective

The state is everywhere—governing, regulating, punishing, protecting. But what happens when law and state power don't work the way we assume they should? This assignment invites you to **engage critically and creatively** with ideas from **Pirie and Aretxaga** by exploring how law functions in different cultural settings and how state power shapes (or distorts) social life. Instead of simply analyzing theory, you will **bring these concepts to life**—whether through an imaginative scenario, a policy sketch, or an artistic interpretation of state power.

Part 1: Concept Reflection – Choose One (150-200 words)

Select **one** concept from **Pirie's Fernanda Pirie, "The Anthropology of Law" (Chapter 8: Law and The State)** that **deepens your understanding of how law functions across cultures.**

What to Include:

Define the concept in your own words.

Explain its significance in understanding law in an anthropological context.

Apply it to a real-world example (historical, contemporary, or personal).

Example: *"Pirie describes law as a 'flexible institution' that adapts to social norms rather than merely enforcing rigid rules. This explains why informal justice systems—such as community-based conflict resolution in rural areas—often hold more authority than formal courts."*

Part 2: Creative Engagement – Choose One (200-250 words OR visual submission)

Instead of writing another analysis, **bring Aretxaga's "Maddening States" to life** in a creative way. **Choose one** of the following options:

Option A: Short Scene – "A Day in the Maddening State"

- Write a **mini-scene (200-250 words)** that captures **how state power shapes daily life.**
- Your scenario can be **realistic or surreal**, inspired by history, current events, or personal observations.

Examples:

- A person tries to renew their ID but gets caught in an endless bureaucratic loop.
- A citizen receives contradictory laws from different government offices.
- A community experiences increased surveillance but is told it's for their "protection."

Option B: Political Cartoon or Visual Representation

- Create a **drawing, collage, meme, or graphic representation** that captures Aretxaga's ideas about state power.

- **Submit your image as a JPEG or PDF** with a **short caption (50-100 words)** explaining the connection to the reading.

Examples:

- A cartoon depicting a state official lost in their own paperwork.
- A surreal image of a government building turning into a maze.
- A meme about how the state makes simple tasks unnecessarily complex.

Part 3: Final Reflection Question

End your submission with **one open-ended question** that connects the readings to a broader issue of **law, power, or bureaucracy**.

Example: *Is bureaucracy an instrument of order, or is it a tool of control? How do we know when law serves justice versus state power?*

Format & Submission

Guidelines:

Step 1: Write a **150-200 word concept reflection** based on Pirie.

Step 2: Choose **Option A (Short Scene)** or **Option B (Political Cartoon/Visual)** (200-250 words OR an image + caption).

Step 3: End with **one thought-provoking question**.

Submit as a **Word/PDF document OR image file (JPEG, PNG, PDF)**

Grading Criteria

- ✓ **Engagement with Readings** – Demonstrates understanding of Pirie & Aretxaga.
- ✓ **Creativity & Application** – Makes abstract concepts feel real and relevant.
- ✓ **Depth of Thought** – Critical insight through reflection and final question.
- ✓ **Clarity & Presentation** – Well-organized, concise, and engaging.

Final Thought: *States create laws, but laws also create the state. What happens when the system we trust to maintain order becomes irrational? How do we navigate the maddening nature of bureaucracy and power?*

Let's explore the complex dance between law and the state.



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