

## Walia vs. Locke - On Borders and Security

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In 1690, John Locke anonymously published *The Second Treatises of Civil Government*, which introduced topics in civil government that were crucial in the foundation of the Constitution of the United States, specifically the “state of nature,” natural rights, and liberty.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Harsha Walia criticizes the US’ modern development of border policy and legislation preventing the realization of civil liberties. A conflict, the root of which can be traced to the definition of natural rights and liberties.

Harsha Walia and John Locke write about the importance of liberty but present unique interpretations of its definition. For Walia, liberty is the ability to move freely and have control over one's own life. For Locke, liberty is essentially the right to own property (and the right to its security) and to be free from the subjugation of others equally liberated. Yet, each definition has its limitations and contradictions.

Locke argues that borders are necessary to protect people's liberty. He argues that “all men may be restrained from invading others' rights” by securitizing “his property” (Locke, p. 3). The securitization of which comes in the form of the right to ownership, protection, arms, and borders in the securitization of countries. Yet, Locke hypocritically condones governmental conquest over others in a similar state of liberty, given it is through a “lawful war.” Does this not infringe on the conquered’s right to property and security regardless of just rulers? There is no “right side,” as Locke puts it, in the global state of nature, as each locus of civil government guarantees its members the same natural liberties Locke presents. Still, Locke suggests the conquered “must at least be as much freemen as they were before,” “enjoy a part of the spoil,” and “are not... to be slaves by conquest” (Locke, p. 23). Regardless of whether this was the ideology during US expansion and imperialism, it is not evident even today, as Walia reveals.

Contrary to Locke, Walia argues that borders are a form of violence that restricts people's natural liberties and, in most cases, dispossesses individuals of their previous liberties. Walia highlights the US-Mexico border as a method of “frontier fascism.” Citing the western expansion in “1837 included massacring Indigenous people and expanding slavery,” Walia underscores the

subjugation of previously free people and the theft of Lockean liberties (Walia, ch. 1, "Conquest as Border Formation"). Furthermore, the freedoms of the now "conquered people" do not align with Locke's philosophy of the conquered sharing the same liberties and spoils as Walia identifies the racialized treatment of what these subjugated people (now collectively being called "illegal immigrants") must face under a government that allows "white nationalism" (Walia, ch. 1). Summarily, Walia notes the chant echoing through border protests: 'We did not cross the border, the border crossed us.'

The fundamental difference in Locke and Walia's perception of the border is in their purpose. Under Locke's envisioning of the border, it protects personal property and other liberties from people not under the same "social contract." However, as Walia argues, the modern implications of this policy subjugate all others not considered by the "contract" and corrupt the equality of these contractual Lockean liberties.

## References

1. Rogers, Graham A.J.. "John Locke". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 25 Aug. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Locke>. Accessed 9 October 2023.