

Interview – Dana Gold

Written by E-International Relations

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This feature is part of a series of interviews with the contributing authors of *Foundations of International Relations* (2022, Bloomsbury).

Dana Gold works in regulatory strategy and research for the Ontario Public Service. She was a PhD candidate in Political Science at the Western University between 2012 and 2018. She is the coauthor of two chapters in *Foundations of International Relations* and previously was the winner of the 2019 E-IR article award.

Your co-authored chapters in *Foundations of International Relations* deal with IR theory. How did you first get involved in thinking about this particular area?

My interest in International Relations as a discipline piqued during the first year of my graduate studies as a master's student. I had taken several courses in International Relations theory, which were divided into traditional versus critical approaches much like the chapters in the textbook. A thorough understanding of the field requires delving into various ways of thinking about how the world functions and the role of states, organisations and individuals. The more I was engaged in the study of International Relations, the more I realized how different pieces fit together like a puzzle and that they are all very much a part of how global politics is both influenced and operates.

In terms of your journey from one-time student to professional life, how did you find your way, and can you give a brief summary of your career thus far?

I completed an Honours Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Western University and went on to obtain a Master of Arts in International Relations from McMaster University. My MA thesis investigated how emotion has largely been left out of International Relations, despite renewed calls from scholars. It also explored how the topic of emotion can be applied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is a complex issue causing deep psychological traumas on both sides. I presented my thesis at the Association for Israel Studies (AIS) annual conference in 2013, held at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), and received the Kimmerling Award for the best paper presented by a graduate student, which was subsequently published in the *Israel Studies Review* in 2015. I then began a doctoral program in Political Science at Western University, where my thesis combines perspectives from both the social and cognitive sciences in examining how mental representations of the 'Other' are portrayed in Israeli and Palestinian textbooks, and am planning to return to this project in the future. Although I continue to contribute to academia by publishing and attending conferences, I have since then joined the Ontario Public Service working in regulatory strategy and research where I am able to translate a theoretical knowledge of politics to a more hands-on setting.

How has the way you understand the world changed over time, and what (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking?

There's a common saying that goes along the lines of "the more you learn, the less you know." I truly agree with this statement and am a big believer in continuous learning and development. Despite our circumstances or background and training, we must evolve along with our world. Just as the Cold War largely changed the face of communism and the perception of fear of impending doom and nuclear annihilation, we are faced with our own challenges today with the Covid-19 pandemic and continued sporadic wars throughout the world. The global landscape will only continue to

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change and this textbook enables readers to reflect on multiple perspectives of International Relations by taking into account emerging issues, which is essentially what the case study sections of the theory chapters have to offer.

The individual who has most impacted my thinking has been my doctoral dissertation supervisor, Dr. Andres Perez-Baltodano. The lens through which he views the world is truly extraordinary, by studying how the mind plays a role in everyday decision making and is often unaccounted for in determining factors, such as justifications for war. Dr. Perez-Baltodano encouraged me to read widely outside of Political Science, and even the social sciences, in gaining wisdom from other schools of thought.

Do you think it is more important for academics (and students by extension) to dedicate most of their time to understanding the world, or instead actively to working to change it?

On a more general level, the two parts of this question go hand in hand – it is through an understanding of the world around us that gives us the tools and awareness to make a positive and meaningful change. We need to appreciate emerging issues we face – whether it is climate change, poverty, diplomacy, etc. – in order to recognise the work necessary to accomplish our goals. One cannot go about combatting global warming without learning about its causes and how to prevent further harm to the planet. Academics tend to focus on research and analysis, which can then be used by those outside the ivory tower to work towards long-term solutions. The challenge exists between reconciling these different worlds and students can be relied upon as a bridge to assist in this process.

Where do you see the most exciting research and debates happening in and around the discipline of International Relations?

With the evolution of global events, International Relations will be forced to advance with them. Seeing theory in practice is the real test of how well ideas will hold up in the real world and which ones may be outdated or need tweaking. Novel issues, for example around artificial intelligence, virtual currency and cyber security will influence International Relations and which directions scholars may choose to focus on in the future. Contributions by students must not be overlooked as they will have much to offer to what we may refer to as “next great debates” in the field, which will guide curriculum and materials as well as academic publications and conference themes. Students will become our future leaders and experts and we should give them a voice in shaping the outlook of International Relations.

What is the most important advice you could give to students who are starting their journey with International Relations?

The study of International Relations, just as with any new subject, takes time to grasp given the many competing schools of thought. I would encourage prospective students to be kind to themselves and keep an open mind in studying the material before coming up with their own evaluation as to which theory or issue may be useful or hold more weight. It may take reading through the material several times in order to fully appreciate the matters at hand in both presenting and defending an argument. One’s relationship with International Relations can be a lifelong journey that will evolve over time. I would also recommend reaching out to experts in the field with whom students can speak to and learn from, perhaps in understanding how the field is applicable to current global events.

Those who read your chapter in *Foundations of International Relations* will take away many ideas and thoughts with them, but is there something specific you would like to leave in their minds?

My contributions to the textbook can be found in chapters 6 and 7, which offer many complex ideas and theories, and may seem somewhat of an information overload at the onset. However, the chapters are structured in a way that break up the traditional versus critical approaches, with the theoretical components at the start of the chapter followed by case studies. The aim is to assist readers in perceiving the impact of International Relations beyond the material, with invaluable tools should students wish to continue with the subject. Those familiar with the field may already have a good understanding of the various competing theories although the examples offered throughout the chapters may provide more clarity or allow a viewpoint that may not have initially be considered. The authors of these

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chapters aim to broaden the minds of readers and keep a conversation about International Relations going.