

CFP's 10 questions with anthropology student and filmmaker, Isabel Irwin



1. How was your CFP experience (when, where? Who was your pair?...)

*I had an incredible time with my pair, Melin Onkaya, in San Francisco in 2019.*

2. Are you still in touch with your pair (or any other Turkish-speaking alumni)?

*Yes! I'm very much still in touch with Melin. Last summer we actually went on a 10-day roadtrip around North India and a couple of weeks in Nepal (5 years after our trip with CFP). We had caught up over video call during the semester and realized that we'd both be in South Asia for different uni-related reasons around the same time, so we planned everything out! Apart from that trip, we always catch up when we're both at home during breaks, and our families still host each other for meals once in a while.*

3. Would you say CFP changed or influenced you in any way? If so, how.

*For sure! I didn't know at the time, but the experience likely informed my choice of Anthropology as my course of study. It also largely led me to become more interested in the Cyprus problem and the importance of bi-communality, which led to the project I'm co-directing this summer.*

4. It's my understanding that you've recently received a film grant, which you'll be putting to use this summer. What made you decide to centre your film around Cyprus?

*Serin and I were always going to center our project around Cyprus, and documentary film is just a great medium for us to communicate our message.*

*When I arrived at Princeton for International Orientation, I came in thinking that there were only 2 Cypriots in my year. During one of the group icebreakers, I sat in a 12-15 person circle playing 'Mafia' (or 'Palermo'). I started reading people's name tags and I noticed that a girl sitting opposite me had 'Cyprus' in bold under her name!*

*Serin and I quickly became friends and would often meet up and talk about politics and our experiences growing up in Cyprus over coffee. I had grown up in the South, while she had grown up in the North. These conversations continued and we started organizing dinners with the other two Cypriots in our year. We eventually founded a Cypriots' Student Society (CYSS) at our uni, which we're currently co-presidents of.*

*Then, in my second year at uni, I started taking a bunch of filmmaking courses. When we realized that we shared this passion, we decided to apply for various grants to make a documentary together at home over the summer and bring some of our conversations to life.*

*Over last winter break, we worked together to draft our proposals and submit applications. Although we had agreed to make the film whether or not we were supported by our university, we were incredibly happy to end up getting one!*

5. Could you share with us your vision for the film and how you hope it will impact your audience?

*Our vision for the film centered around three main messages. First is showing that the Cypriot identity is a distinct identity, separate from Greece and Turkey. The second is investigating the importance of the last remaining organically bicomunal spaces on the island, and giving a platform to the voices of the people who maintain these spaces. Lastly, we hope to show how Cypriot coffee culture and bicomunal spaces may have a relationship which could be utilized to create more spaces which foster cross-border interaction .*

*Having finished up all of our interviews now, we're in the process of shaping the film's narrative and deciding what exactly we want our message to be, based on both our initial project proposal and what we've learned since from our interlocutors.*

*In general, we hope to start conversations with our film, as well as platform and raise awareness for bicomunal spaces. At the same time, we hope to inspire more creative projects to be led by bicomunal student teams.*

6. How did you ensure that both Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot perspectives will be featured in the film?

*The film is co-directed by Serin and I, which is an important feature of this project as we are a Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot team. This is of course not enough in itself though, and we've prioritized equal representation of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot voices throughout the project process.*

*More specifically, we have interviews in both Turkish-Cypriot dialect and Greek-Cypriot dialect which we will feature for equal amounts in the film. We have also chosen our locations based on having equal visual representation of each side of the island, and the opinions of people who live on both sides (or in-between, like Pyla).*

7. Have you come across anything surprising about Cypriot coffee and/or peace culture while conducting research/filming?

*While there aren't specific facts that I can point to which have been surprising, I feel that our knowledge of the island has become more complex and nuanced. Listening to people's stories and opinions have felt fulfilling for us both, and having an excuse to explore unfamiliar corners of the island has been invaluable.*

*I would say that Pyla and Rizokarpaso/Dipkarpaz were the two locations I learned the most from. I had never really been to either location before, and seeing spaces where both communities live together, and interviewing public figures in each village was incredibly interesting. For example, we spoke to and interviewed both the Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot Muhtars in Pyla, and a Greek-Cypriot cafe owner in Rizokarpaso. Meeting people who speak Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot fluently in these spaces was also surprising to me. Although I knew that many people did speak both languages before the island's division, I was still surprised every time someone we met swapped so easily from one language to the other.*

8. Where can we (eventually) watch your film?

*We're going to host screenings both in the US and on both sides of the island in accessible spaces such as Yalla's collective space and cafe and the Home for Cooperation. We haven't begun organizing the events yet since it's still a while away, but we'll definitely promote it lots when the time comes around in order to reach as many people as we can. After the screenings, we'll make the film freely available online for anyone to watch.*

*We want to make sure we're fully happy with what we've made, and also both of us to be at the events, which is why we may screen either during next winter break or next summer.*

9. Is it true that your film will be presented to an international audience? How hopeful are you about this film making a difference?

*Yes! We're going to host a public screening at our University in the US, as well as submit it to international film festivals. We want to give this film as wide of a reach as possible, both in Cyprus and abroad!*

*About this film making a difference, we hope to start conversations and make a statement in the fact that a Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot college student made it together. We also want the film to show hope for the island, and focus on how we can move forward. In reality, I don't think that the film will change our political situation, but every small effort counts.*

10. What would you say to other CFP alumni who are feeling inspired after attending CFP, but uncertain over how to turn motivation into action?

*I would say visit the Buyuk Han coffee club (also known as 'the traitors club')! They're the most welcoming, sweetest group of people. They just meet for coffee every Saturday at 11am in Buyuk Han with people from both sides of the divide. Serin and I have had really interesting conversations there over the past few weeks we've visited.*

*Filling spaces that promote bi-communality, like Yalla Collective space and Cafe, the Hade language tables, Hoi Polloi, and the Buyuk Han coffee club is a simple action that I believe makes a big difference! Also, maintaining friendships made during CFP and pursuing more cross-border friendships can't be understated. Every small effort to keep us connected counts, and it doesn't have to be a big action to make a real difference!*