

Ummye Kocak: A success story from the Turkish countryside to New York

by Duygu Yildiz - 06/12/2017 11:26



Ummye Kocak is a play writer, director and women’s rights activist who was unable to continue her education after primary school in a family of 10 siblings. 59-year-old Kocak has inspired many women struggling against patriarchal pressure and financial incapacitation in Turkey. Her first film *Yun Bebek*(The Wool Doll) received an award by the New York Eurasian Film Festival.

After completing her education in primary school, Kocak read many books for self-development, she said in an interview once. The first book she read was *The Mother* by Maxim Gorky. Kocak moved to Mersin’s Arslankoy village after getting married, and she formed the Arslankoy Women’s Theatre Group in 2001 to show the life of women in Turkey’s rural areas.

She saved money by working as a farm labourer for years and funded her first movie. Her first budget film, which focused on the issue of violence against women, brought Kocak the award for “Best Eurasian Actress in Cinema” at the New York Eurasian

Film Festival in 2014.

“I want everyone to see this film. It has been screened in many parts of Turkey. If I can find a sponsor, I want to shoot The Wool Doll 2,” she said.

Elif, her main character in The Wool Doll, becomes a teacher despite difficult circumstances. Those who had the advantages of higher education may be a hope for children like herself, thinks Elif, in the movie.

“We women are the slaves of TV series and nonsense programs. We need to shake ourselves up. We are smart; we can do anything we want,” Kocak says.

Kocak gave a TED talk, which is a non-profit organisation devoted to spreading ideas. She told her success story from the countryside of Mersin to New York and encouraged women to be creative and brave. She was the first southern Turkish woman to give a TED talk.

Kocak has been married for 35 years, is a mother of two and has written 11 plays to date. She has been on stage with the Arslankoy Women’s Theatre Group approximately 500 times and their plays have been viewed by 30 thousand spectators from all around Turkey.