

Series Review

KIZILCIK ŞERBETİ (CRANBERRY SORBET)

(Show TV, TR 2022–present)

Since 2022, the television series KIZILCIK ŞERBETİ has been broadcast weekly on one of Türkiye's most-watched television channels, Show TV. As of 25 January 2025, the 85th episode is airing. From its very first episode, the series has portrayed the tensions and conflicts between individuals who, on one hand, comply with and, on the other, reject practices with roots in Turkish-Islamic culture. Focusing on two families – one secular and the other conservative – the series depicts one of the most critical dichotomies in Turkish politics for many years: the issue of the headscarf and belief in God. Through these characters, it mirrors broader societal conflicts within the country. The series focuses on the relationship between the Ünal family, who lead a conservative lifestyle in accordance with the principles of Islam – in the context of the series, the Turkish Sunni state religion – and the Korkmaz family, who represent a more modern and secular way of life.

In the first episode of the series, two main characters, Fatih Ünal and Doğa Korkmaz, fall in love and decide to marry hastily after Doğa becomes pregnant. Kivılcım Korkmaz, who is the young woman's mother and the matriarch of the Korkmaz family, is portrayed as a hardworking, strong, authoritative, and disciplined woman. Abdullah Ünal, who is the patriarch of the Ünal family, is depicted as a traditionalist, a charismatic, authoritarian, disciplined, and wealthy father figure. In Turkish society, premarital sexual relations, especially when they result in pregnancy, are considered inappropriate and may be followed by marriage as a corrective measure. While the conservative Ünal family supports the young couple's sudden decision to marry, the secular Korkmaz family strongly opposes it under any circumstance.

This marriage, which both families object to due to their contrasting lifestyles and values, is also subject to certain regulations in both the Turkish Constitution and the State religion. According to the Turkish Civil Code and Turkish Islamic law, which is based on the Qur'an, the most fundamental requirement for the establishment of a new family is a lawful agreement between a man and a woman who meet the necessary conditions. In other words, marriage is formalized through a valid contract that establishes a new family unit.¹ While the Turkish Civil Code does not impose any restrictions based on religious differences with regard to marriage, Islamic law does, especially regarding non-Muslims. However, the families in the series are not non-Muslim. Their lifestyles differ, not their religious beliefs.

The television series explores tensions that primarily stem from cultural differences and contrasting perspectives. The headscarf stands as a symbol of the conflict between a traditional Muslim Turkish family and a modern Muslim Turkish family. A young woman who marries into a conservative family is the only woman in the household who does not wear a headscarf, reflecting core dynamics of Turkish society, where cultural tensions often arise despite a shared religious background.

The series reflects a long-standing public debate in Türkiye: after the Turks adopted Islam in the 10th century, influenced by Arab and Iranian cultures, Turkish-Islamic culture acquired a new character, in which wearing a headscarf or turban symbolised a woman's modesty, chastity, and "mystery".² However, as this issue became politicized in the 1980s, a public perception emerged in Türkiye of veiled women as narrow-minded and reactionary, while those without headscarves were considered modern and educated. Over time such cultural differences can cause internal alienation within a society, as the series presents. It depicts an internal religious discourse, which is illustrated here by two different families, and highlights the diversity of Muslim views. Islam's approach to the headscarf has varied. The Qur'an contains verses regarding the covering and clothing of both women and men. Verses related to women's covering, known as "Hijab", are referred to repeatedly in the series:

Episode 2/Season 3, Surah Al-A'raf, Verse 26:

O children of Adam! We have given you clothing to cover your private parts and as adornment. But the best clothing is the clothing of right-

1 Karakaya 2024.

2 İşçi 2000.

eousness. These (clothing) are among the signs of Allah, (which He has bestowed upon you), that they may understand the truth.

Episode 2/Season 6, Surah Al-A'raf, Verse 27:

O Children of Adam! Let not Satan deceive you, as he removed your parents from Paradise, stripping them of their clothing to show them their private parts. Because he and his followers see you from where you cannot see them. Verily, We have made the devils allies to those who do not believe.

Episode 3/Season 8, Surah An-Nur, Verse 30:

(O Prophet!) Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at what is forbidden) and guard their private parts. (Indeed) that is purer/more appropriate for them. Indeed, Allah is all-aware of what they do.

Episode 3/Season 13, Surah Al-Ahzab, Verse 33:

(O wives of the Prophet!) Stay in your homes and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance. And establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. (O people of the Prophet's) household! Allah only intends to remove sin from you and to intends to purify you thoroughly.

Episode 4/Season 15, Surah Al-Ahzab, Verse 59:

O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves part of their outer garments. This (clothing) is more suitable, that they will be known and not be hurt. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.³

While the general idea of covering is common to Muslims, the interpretation of what “covering” means varies from country to country and region to region.⁴ In Türkiye, traditional women cover themselves primarily by covering their hair. With changing fashion trends and the influence of popular culture, more modern and hat-like coverings have often replaced long garments and large headscarves in the form of turbans. It is striking that the series does

3 Abdel Haleem, M. A., 2008, *The Qur'an. A New Translation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

4 Yıldız 2017.

not highlight this broad spectrum and instead draws a clear dichotomy between modern and traditional. The quoted verses from the Qur'an not only guide women to cover themselves but also aim to shape their way of life, including their participation in society and work. The urbanization that began in Türkiye after 1950, with migration to cities increasing as a result of certain economic policies, also affected women, who began to occupy different positions in society.⁵ The participation of women in the workforce has increased, regardless of whether they wear a headscarf. Particularly since 2013, when the headscarf ban in public spaces was lifted, the number of women wearing headscarves in higher education and the private and public sectors has risen, and they no longer are "othered" to the same extent.

These debates and developments are reflected in the series *KIZILCIK ŞERBETİ*. The headscarf serves as a symbol for different lifestyles: women's clothing, in particular their wearing of a headscarf, is a visual cue to their conservative or secular lifestyle. A social divide is evident: the women of the conservative family do not work outside the home and instead organize family life and prepare wonderful meals; the women of the secular family are portrayed as highly educated and successful in their careers.

In the first episode, Kivilcim, who is depicted as a modern and authoritarian educator, expresses her disapproval of a woman wearing a headscarf whom she bumps into at a store, saying, "They are everywhere." Her reaction reflects an underlying tension. In this dialogue, the woman who is wearing a headscarf is othered in a snapshot of the longstanding societal conflicts surrounding the headscarf in Türkiye. Later in the episode, as women in headscarves begin to voice their objections, Kivilcim, who claims that veiled women have no place in the modern shopping world, finds herself confronted by law enforcement. As the series progresses, the modern character ultimately apologizes to the conservative side. This development recalls the headscarf debates of the 1990s in Türkiye and highlights the significance of the current social acceptance of the headscarf. Throughout its modernization, from the Ottoman period to the present day, Türkiye has marginalized the headscarf, a symbol in tradition and religious belief, through its interactions with the West and particularly through populist political discourses. Where the elites in Türkiye frequently disregarded the headscarf even as other segments of society continued to wear it, since the 2000s the headscarf has also gained acceptance amongst the elites.

5 Altınöz 2011.

Dialogue during the scene in the first episode when the young woman introduces her boyfriend to her mother also reflects opposition to headscarf-wearing, with references to “those with covered heads”. When Doğa’s mother hosts Fatih at their home to meet him for the first time, she offers him alcoholic beverages. Fatih’s reaction, reminding her that consuming alcohol is a sin, reveals another point of cultural and religious tension. According to traditional Islamic beliefs, and particularly the concepts of halal and haram, all intoxicating substances and those produced with the intention of causing intoxication are forbidden, and their consumption is sinful.⁶ Furthermore, during this visit Fatih kisses the grandmother’s hand and brings it to his forehead as a sign of respect, a gesture that is met with disdain by the modern mother, who describes him as “uncultured” and “low-class”. While these actions are traditions specific to Anatolia, they also reflect the respect shown towards elders in traditional Turkish Islamic culture. The conservative side refers to those who follow a secular lifestyle as “degenerate people who have lost their way in the name of modernity”, while the secular side sees such physical acts and the headscarf as symbols of backwardness, associating them with slums, poverty, and underdevelopment. In the series, the distinction between the two attitudes is conveyed by outward appearance and by physical actions.

Throughout its airing, the series, which focuses on the conflicts between individuals from two families with different perspectives, uses the headscarf, work-life, and bodily practices to portray individual freedoms and values. All members of a single family do not necessarily share the same values. With 85 episodes, this series has been extremely successful. Using family constellations, it raises social and religious questions that are much debated in Türkiye. However, it also reduces the complexity and diversity of Turkish Islam to just two positions, the traditional and the secular, and plays them off against each other.

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6 Elgün 2019.

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Filmography

KIZILCIK ŞERBETİ (CRANBERRY SORBET, created by: Melis Civelek, Show TV, TR 2022–present).