

The Robert K. Merton Best Paper Award 2018

International Network of Analytical Sociology (INAS)

awarded to

Ozan Aksoy and Diego Gambetta
“Behind the Veil: The Strategic Use of Religious Garb”
European Sociological Review 32(6), 2016

The paper focuses on a socially and politically relevant social phenomenon, i.e. veiling among Muslim women. The authors investigate the association between this behavior and exposure to the potential secularizing effect of modernization dynamics, addressing the apparent paradoxical observation that educated, urban, and middle-class women seem more kin to veil. To explain this puzzle, the authors postulate a signaling mechanism according to which highly-educated women are more likely to be exposed to "risky" social settings where they feel more urged to signal their religiosity through veiling. The authors assess the existence of a statistical signature of this mechanism studying cross-sectional data on Muslim women in Turkey and Belgium as well as Muslim women in 25 other countries.

Through carefully specified structural equation modeling, where religiosity is treated as a latent variable, they provide convincing empirical evidence in favor of the postulated mechanism.

The committee unanimously appreciate the article's well-defined explanatory focus, the clear description of an understandable micro-level mechanism, the delineation of specific macro-level consequences, as well as the careful deductive reasoning in the formulation of testable hypotheses. Methodologically, the committee appreciates the intelligent use of statistical interaction terms to argue in favor of the postulated explanatory mechanism.