

**A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD: CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE
MOBILIZATION OF MORALLY TAINTED CULTURAL RESOURCES**

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Abstract

We aim to highlight a type of cultural entrepreneurship, which has received scant attention by prior scholarship, and consists in deploying morally tainted cultural resources, i.e., resources that some audiences assess as going against accepted principles of morality. We argue that this type of cultural entrepreneurship is a double-edged sword and explain how it may ignite active opposition of offended audiences, as well as attract supportive audiences. We delineate a research agenda to shed light on whether, how, and with what consequences cultural entrepreneurs navigate such a tension — in particular how they 1) mobilize morally tainted cultural resources and with what effect on offended audiences; 2) deal with the consequent legitimacy challenges; 3) transform moral taint into “coolness” to enhance their venture’s distinctiveness.

Keywords: cultural entrepreneurship, morality, legitimacy, distinctiveness, cultural resources

Introduction

Cultural entrepreneurship consists in the deployment of cultural resources to start up new ventures or pursue new market opportunities in established ventures (see Gehman & Soubliere, 2017 for a recent review). Cultural resources are meaning systems such as “stories, frames, categories, rituals, practices” and symbols that constitute the culture of a given societal group (Giorgi, Lockwood, & Glynn, 2015, 13). In line with Swidler’s (1986) conceptualization of culture as a toolkit, prior studies highlighted that entrepreneurs use cultural resources flexibly, either alone or combined, to develop new strategies of action (Weber & Dacin, 2011). For example, entrepreneurs have been said to draw *concepts* and *identity categories* from different registers such as the arts, the crafts, and psychoanalysis, to develop new ideas about values and functions of industrial products, and new product lines (Rindova, Dalpiaz, & Ravasi, 2011). Entrepreneurs can also recombine *institutional logics* (i.e., sets of guiding principles and legitimate practices in a given field) to devise and implement new organizational practices that enable to search for and target new market opportunities (Dalpiaz, Rindova, & Ravasi, 2016).

Prior studies also suggested that cultural entrepreneurs can use *stories and other linguistic means* to convey a venture’s distinctiveness within an established category of firms (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001) and construct the identity of an emerging category of firms (Wry, Glynn, & Lounsbury, 2010). For example, grappa producers crafted stories to detach their product from existing understanding of grappa as a low-class spirit (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016), and satellite radio producers deployed linguistic frames and metaphors that linked the unfamiliar, emerging category of satellite radio to better understood ones (Navis & Glynn, 2010).

By illuminating the positive function of cultural resources for cultural entrepreneurship, prior research seems to assume that cultural resources are intrinsically good, and that their deployment for entrepreneurial purposes is consequently legitimate. In contrast to the established perspective, we argue that cultural entrepreneurship can be a highly controversial phenomenon when the mobilized cultural resources are *morally tainted*, i.e., considered offensive and conflicting with the principles of moral behavior that some societal groups uphold. An example is offered by “La Mafia se sienta a la mesa” (“The Mafia sits at the table”), a fast-growing restaurant franchise that serves Italian-style dishes in Spain and that constructed its identity and distinctiveness around mafia-related symbols and stories. While the venture’s

use of such cultural resources has been met with growing support by customers and industry associations in Spain, it sparked a fierce opposition in Italy — the country where mafia originated and still operates, and where mafia activities are perceived to go against the basic moral norms of society. Such an opposition ultimately jeopardized the venture’s sustainability and led the entrepreneurs to water down several elements of the venture’s distinctiveness.

We contend that mobilizing morally tainted cultural resources offers a double-edged sword for entrepreneurs as it may enhance the venture’s distinctiveness among some audiences but spark fierce opposition amongst offended social groups. Our intent is to bring such a phenomenon to the attention of scholars interested in cultural entrepreneurship because whether and how cultural entrepreneurs can harness this tension, and with what consequences, is still unknown. Exploring this phenomenon is not only important to advance knowledge about cultural entrepreneurship. Investigating the consequences of using morally tainted resources promises to advance also extant understanding of organizational stigma, i.e., the perception of a fundamental, deep-seated flaw that discredits an organization (Devers *et al.*, 2009; Helms & Patterson, 2014). Prior work indicated that organizations can be stigmatized when their core activities are considered morally tainted – as in the case of gay bathhouses (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009), mixed-martial arts organizations (Helms & Patterson, 2014), and the first company to offer travel to the masses (Hampel & Tracey, 2017) – or when organizations associate themselves to morally tainted people – e.g., immigrants (Tracey & Phillips, 2016). Yet, prior studies did not highlight whether and how moral taint attributed to the *cultural resources* an organization mobilizes, rather than attributed to its core activities, associated people, or events, can be a source of stigma. Nor they investigated whether and how such form of moral taint can also be a source of an organization’s distinctiveness that elicit support among non-offended audiences. Thus, this essay paves the way also to new scholarly investigation about the origin and consequences of organizational stigma.

This essay is organized as follow. First, we provide some illustrative cases and then discuss specific aspects, challenges and opportunities of morally tainted cultural entrepreneurship. We conclude by delineating a research agenda.

Some illustrative cases

To exemplify the phenomenon of cultural entrepreneurship mobilizing morally tainted cultural resources we present three illustrative cases (see Table 1 for a summary): the restaurant franchise “La Mafia se sienta a la mesa,” the “Jack the Ripper Museum,” and the clothing designer “KA Design”. What these ventures have in common is the use symbols and stories that are part of a society’s culture but are nonetheless considered offensive and insulting by some societal groups; the use of such resources for either defining the venture’s identity (in the case of the restaurant chain and the museum) or developing new products (in the case of the clothing company); and the fierce opposition mounted by critical audiences that force the ventures to take corrective action.

---Insert Table 1 about here---

“La Mafia se sienta a la mesa” and the mobilization of cultural elements related to the mafia. “La mafia se sienta a la mesa” is a restaurant franchise serving Italian-style dishes in Spain. Since its founding in Zaragoza in 2002, it has grown to 42 outlets throughout the country. In 2016, it reported 36.5 million euros in revenues and employed 700 people. At the time of writing, most restaurants were rated with four (out of five) stars in TripAdvisor, which signals a very positive evaluation from customers in a highly competitive industry. Until 2014, the venture deployed a plethora of symbols associated with the Italian mafia to build a distinctive identity. For example, the trademark “La Mafia se sienta a la mesa” was associated to the red rose worn by Vito Corleone in the iconic Godfather movie; numerous pictures of characters and places featured in the Godfather's trilogy decorated the indoor space; mobsters’ names were inscribed on chairs and walls; baby high-chairs were embellished with pictures of a lookalike of Vito Corleone eating spaghetti; and candies wrapped in black paper and labelled “La Mafia” were available to children.

Symbols and stories of the mafia are certainly part of the Western culture, especially since they became popularized by iconic Hollywood movies such as “The Godfather” trilogy, “Scarface,” “Al Capone,” and “The untouchables.” Yet, mobilizing such resources for constructing a restaurant’s identity turned out to be deeply offensive for the Italian people. Following a report by the Italian daily La Repubblica in 2014, a restaurant guidebook de-listed the restaurant, the Italian media covered extensively and negatively the franchise, and the matter was brought to the attention of the Parliament and the Italian Anti-Mafia Commission. Eventually, the Republic of Italy filed a complaint to the EU Intellectual

Property Office (EUIPO) to remove the trademark “La Mafia se sienta a la mesa” on the grounds that it was deeply offensive for the Italian people and trivialized a brutal and still contemporary criminal organization¹.

In response to such a powerful opposition, the venture’s communication manager explained that “everything is inspired to the Godfather movie” and that the use of mafia-related references is core to the venture’s distinctiveness as “the mafia is an absolute brand, it calls the attention, everyone remembers this name” (La Repubblica, 2014). Yet, references to real mafia mobsters were removed from existing restaurants and excluded from new openings (Heraldo, 2014); other symbols, such as the red rose in the visual trademark, were also removed. In 2016, the EUIPO declared the nullity of the trademark for being contrary to accepted principles of morality. The venture appealed the decision and the outcome is still unknown at the time of writing.

“Jack the Ripper museum” and the mobilization of sexual violence stories. The Jack the Ripper museum opened its door in east London in 2015. On an ongoing soundtrack of women screaming, the museum re-enacts and vividly explains how and where the notorious serial-killer, dubbed Jack the Ripper, who lived in Victorian London, brutally murdered and eviscerated his female victims. In 2015, on occasion of Halloween celebration, the museum also offered visitors the chance to pose for a photo with actors playing the serial killer next to mutilated victims.

The story and the mystery surrounding the 19th century serial-killer is undeniably part of London’s popular culture. More than a century after the events, his brutal murders have been the subject of several movies such as “Pandora’s Box”, “Murder by Decree”, “The Lodger”, “Hands of the Ripper”, and “From Hell” only to mention the top five according to The Telegraph (2002); the murder locations in east London have become the destination of popular touristic tours, and the identity of the killer and his motives are still investigated and debated in the media (BBC, The Telegraph, etc.).

Yet, feminist groups, human rights advocates, academics, and the media furiously opposed the museum’s opening as they viewed the celebration of a serial-killer’s endeavors as morally repugnant. More

¹ The cancellation of the trademark undermines the legal protection of its distinctive traits, thus allowing competitors to replicate them.

than 13.000 people signed a petition calling for its planning permission to be revoked and the backlash in the media was also intense. For example, journalists accused the museum of glamorizing sexual-violence in a “grotesque subversion” of moral values and of “diminish[ing] the gendered nature of fatal male violence against women” (Guardian, 2015). A year later, the museum’s employees reportedly were still “physically attacked, pelted with eggs, harassed and sworn at” and “under constant siege and fear of being targeted” (Standard, 2016). In 2016, the museum was refused retrospective planning permission for the shop front and it had to take down the sinister black façade with blood-red lettering. Despite the fierce and persistent opposition from some audiences, the museum turned out to be quite popular among visitors, as evidenced by a four out of five stars rating in TripAdvisor, more than 400 reviews, and a TripAdvisor's Certificate of Excellence for 2017.²

The museum reacted to the outcry by claiming that its intent was to celebrate the female victims and their stories rather than the killer, hired an all-female advisory board, and noted that in any case Jack-the Ripper did not sexually assault his victims—a comment later retracted. The museum also appealed to the High Court in a bid to overturn the refusal of the planning permission, but the appeal was refused. The mayor of Tower Hamlet, the London borough where the museum is located, expressed his frustration for the museum survival: “Sadly, the ‘museum’ itself will remain” (Standard, 2016) and encouraged the public to boycott it (Wharf, 2016).

“KA Design” and the mobilization of a genocide symbol. In 2017, KA Design released a line of T-shirts featuring a swastika on a rainbow background, with the words “love,” “peace,” and “zen” underneath. The swastika was the notorious symbol of Hitler’s Third Reich, and has since become the symbol of the genocide of millions of Jews, homosexuals, and ethnic minorities that the Nazis perpetrated in the 1940s. The rainbow is the symbol of pride of the LGBT communities around the world, and by extension it became also a symbol of tolerance and peace.

The release of the product line sparked fury across the world. For example, the Israeli-Jewish Congress denounced the KA Design’s clothing line as “obscene and disgusting” (@Ostrov_A) and international media such as BBC, Daily Mail, and Al Jazeera condemned the new product line

² By comparison, the Science Museum in London, which was established in 1857, has the same rating and less than 7.000 reviews.

vehemently. Others instead, while not condoning Nazism, defended the ancient positive meaning the swastika holds in their own, Asian cultures. In response to such a clamor, KA Design explained that the swastika was also a 5.000 year old auspicious symbol that is part of Hindu and Buddhist iconography and that “the aim of the project was to share the beauty of a symbol detached from the hatred associated to it” (Mail Online, 2017). It also released a modified version of the T-shirt line in which the swastika was crossed over. As the outcry continued, KA Design withdrew the product line and apologized publicly.

Moral taint as a socially constructed evaluation

The examples offered in the prior section illustrate an important feature of cultural resources — that while they can be perceived as morally tainted, i.e., offensive, distasteful and insulting, by some audiences, they can be perceived as non-morally tainted by other audiences. In other words, the evaluation of given cultural resources as morally tainted is socially constructed and as such it may vary across audiences, time, and locales.

Moral taint is a relative judgment as there is “*social and historical variability* in the way people understand the good and the bad, the right and the wrong” (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013: 58), and what is morally forbidden (Haidt & Graham, 2009). Thus, cultural resources are not *inherently* morally tainted but can be constructed as such by given societal groups at a given point in time. For example, in their study of men bathhouses in the USA, Hudson and Okhuysen (2009) suggest that the assessment of bathhouses varied widely among different audiences even within the same State, as members of the heterosexual public diverged on whether sex between men, associated practices and meanings were morally wrong or not, and even members of the homosexual community diverged on whether casual sex was morally wrong or not.

Further, different historical and cultural trajectories provide audiences located in *different countries* with different understandings of moral taint and repertoires for evaluating a venture’s action (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000). The following quote uttered by a Spanish waiter in one of the “La Mafia” restaurants makes this point vividly: “I understand [the indignation] of the Italian people. [Spanish people] would be very offended too if in Italy there was an ETA-themed restaurant³” [La Repubblica, 2014, video capture].

³ ETA was a terrorist Basque separatist organization that killed more than 800 people in Spain between 1968 and 2017. It announced a definitive cessation of its armed activities in April 2017.

Finally, not all morally tainted cultural resources are equally tainted. In other words, some stories and symbols may be more offending than others. For example, an online reviewer commented about the swastika-themed T-shirt line that “there are some symbols and ideas that are too abhorrent to ever be considered for 'rehabilitation'” (Npr, 2017). The existence of different shades of moral taint is coherent with work on “dirty” occupations (see Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014 for a review), which pinpoints to dirty and “dirtier” occupations (e.g., gun store ownership is less morally tainted than corpse brokering, which is less morally tainted than prostitution). The social construction of moral taint poses a distinctive set of challenges to cultural entrepreneurs, which we discuss next.

Heightened legitimacy challenges

A central concern in organizational and entrepreneurship literature is how organizations attain legitimacy, i.e., audiences’ perception that their activities are “desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, 574). Attaining legitimacy is especially crucial for new ventures, as legitimacy is necessary to attract the resources needed for survival and growth (Fisher, Kotha, & Lahiri, 2016). The assessment of an organization’s legitimacy is multifaceted as it encompasses pragmatic, cognitive and moral evaluations (Suchman, 1995). An organization attains pragmatic legitimacy when audiences deem it worthy of exchanging resources with it; cognitive legitimacy when audiences understand or take for granted the organization’s activities; and moral legitimacy when audiences evaluate the organization’s outcomes, procedures, or actions as rightful within a given system of norms. Attaining any of these types of legitimacy is a formidable task because it implies managing the expectations of *multiple audiences* that may evaluate the new venture’s appropriateness along different criteria (Ruef & Scott, 1998; Tracey, Dalpiaz, & Phillips, forthcoming). We contend that, *ceteris paribus*, cultural entrepreneurs that mobilize morally tainted cultural resources face heightened legitimacy challenges compared to entrepreneurs that do not mobilize such resources. This is because in addition to the challenges to attain pragmatic and cognitive legitimacy, which every venture needs to acquire fundamental resources from customers, investors, employees etc., they are more likely to face insidious challenges that are triggered by the use of morally tainted resources and that jeopardize the venture’s moral legitimacy. We articulate such specific challenges next.

The possibility that some audiences within the venture's country or in different countries evaluate the mobilized cultural elements as running against accepted principles of morality exposes the venture to a peculiar threat, i.e. the threat of *active opposition*, rather than just resource withholding. In addition to deny support to the venture, offended audiences may indeed attack and dispute the venture through boycotts, picketing, legal battles, negative press and social-media coverage. The cases of "La mafia se sienta a la mesa" and "Jack the Ripper museum" are suggestive of how far offended audiences may be willing to go to jeopardize a venture's existence or force it to change its identity.

Further, cultural entrepreneurs may be caught off-guard and thus be unprepared to deal with such legitimacy fall-outs. Behavioral ethics research suggests that the wider the social consensus is (or perceived to be) about the immorality of a given issue, the more an individual's action will be aligned with moral principles (Jones, 1991; O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005). It follows that if cultural entrepreneurs *are not cognizant* of whether societal groups consider the mobilized cultural elements morally tainted and of how wide the social consensus about it is, they may neither act to prevent the opposition nor be prepared to deal with it. For example, the communication manager of "La Mafia se sienta a la mesa" declared that they did not foresee such a powerful opposition, as only few Italian customers had complained on social media until La Repubblica's report triggered the Italian government's legal action (Heraldo, 2014). Importantly, by mobilizing morally tainted cultural resources, cultural entrepreneurs may discover to have audiences that they did not expect. To continue with the example above, the Spanish restaurant franchise thought that the Republic of Italy was "not a relevant trade circle" of theirs (EUIPO, 2016, 3). Thus, deploying morally tainted cultural resources can mobilize (and stir the ire of) societal groups that entrepreneurs did not consider relevant and that otherwise would have not hold any interest in the venture.

Further, different shades of moral taint may spark opposition of *different intensity*. We may expect that the more repugnant and offensive cultural resources are perceived to be, the fiercer the opposition might be. Recent work on organizational infamy, for instance, suggests that the more salient and socially significant is the perceived incongruence of the organization's identity with audiences' personal identities, the more the audiences develop negative emotions about the organization (Zavyalova, Pfarrer, & Reger, 2017).

Relatedly, *the way in which ventures use morally tainted resources may aggravate audiences'* perception of how offending the use of such resources is. In the case of the Spanish franchise, the Republic of Italy's argued that the trademark should be cancelled not only because express references to mafia-related names and symbols are in contrast to basic norms of society, but also because the semantic associations of mafia-related names, stories and symbols to the positive values of family and conviviality *trivialize* the negative meaning of the mafia⁴ (UEIPO, 2016). Similarly, in the case of KA Design, audiences found particularly insulting the juxtaposition of a symbol of genocide (the swastika) to symbols of peace and reconciliation (the rainbow and words like "love" and "peace") as the semantic association *diminishes* the negative meaning of the swastika. In the case of the Jack the Ripper museum, journalists' ire were directed instead at the *spectacularization* of male violence against women through the use of soundtrack of female screams, dismembered female models, etc., and the *glamorization* of the male perpetrator, turned into a "cult figure" also through visual merchandise where "Jack the Cult figure stands tall and menacing under lamppost...and the women he killed are reduced to a smudge of blood at his feet" (Guardian, 2015).

Opportunities for distinctiveness

There is another side of the story though. Despite posing complex challenges, mobilizing morally tainted cultural resources can also offer opportunities. As previously shown, while some audiences vehemently object and jeopardize the venture's survival or its new product's success, other audiences may strongly support the use of the very same resources. For example, while the Italian government and media ardently oppose "La mafia se sienta a la mesa," the fast growth in number of outlets and customers' positive online ratings suggest that Spanish customers assess the venture very positively. This may indicate that the strategic deployment of morally tainted cultural resources may be actually an *effective source of distinctiveness* that is rewarded by audiences who do not feel offended by them.

Further, in and by itself, public controversy about the use of morally tainted cultural resources may bring notoriety to the venture and attract positively predisposed audiences. For example, the press

⁴ For example: "The association of the name 'Mafia' with the text 'se sienta a la mesa' (in English 'Mafia sits at the table') is an attempt at giving an attribution of kindness to the name of the most dangerous and brutal organization which ever existed in Italy. It trivializes the negative meaning of such word." (UEIPO, 2016, 2)

coverage about the controversy surrounding the opening of the Jack the Ripper museum has arguably increased the visibility of an otherwise marginal touristic venue, and in turn attracted a higher number of visitors that it would have otherwise. Importantly, public controversy may also trigger a selection process, by which mainly individuals that do not feel offended by the resources mobilized decide to confer their resources to the controversial venture. In turn, this mechanism may increase the chances of resource providers being positively predisposed toward the venture and its offering, and thus more likely to evaluate it positively. For example, those who visited the Jack the Ripper museum despite the arguments for boycotting it may be individuals that did not share the critical audiences' view that the museum glamourized sexual violence against women. The self-selection of positively predisposed visitors may explain the highly positive rating the museum received on TripAdvisor.

In sum, we propose that mobilizing morally tainted cultural resources is a double-edged sword for cultural entrepreneurs: it can unleash the (more or less) fierce opposition of offended audiences, as well as increase visibility and draw the favor of others. Yet, how and with what consequences cultural entrepreneurs can navigate such a tension is unknown. We delineate below a research agenda to shed light on these issues.

A research agenda for cultural entrepreneurship leveraging morally tainted cultural resources

We outline three interesting areas of research that could shed some light on the phenomenon of entrepreneurship mobilizing morally tainted cultural resource: 1) investigating the *strategies for mobilizing* morally tainted cultural resources and their effect on different audiences; 2) exploring the *strategies for reacting* to the legitimacy challenges posed by critical audiences; 3) understanding how morally tainted cultural resource can be made “cool” to enhance the venture’s distinctiveness.

Strategies for mobilizing morally tainted resources. An interesting area of investigation concerns how cultural entrepreneurs mobilize morally tainted cultural resources, and whether different strategies elicit different reactions by different audiences. The examples we offered suggest that multiple strategies may be employed. For example, the Spanish restaurant franchise mobilized mafia-related symbols and stories that were mainly divulged in famous Hollywood movies. Conversely, the Jack the Ripper

museum dramatized stories and symbols of sexual violence perpetrated against real women. KA Design did something again different, as it associated symbols of antithetical meanings (hate and love).

While our examples are only suggestive, future work could theorize what strategies new ventures mobilize to deploy cultural resources that some audiences consider morally tainted. It could be that some strategies are more successful than others in attenuating the moral taint that some audiences associate with the mobilized resources or that some strategies exacerbate how much offended given societal group feel. Future research could also fruitfully investigate how different strategies affect *internal* perceptions, i.e., to what extent different strategies shield organizational members from identity crises that the use of morally tainted resources may trigger (Tracey & Phillips, 2016).

Strategies for reacting to legitimacy challenges. Recent organizational work on organizational stigma has begun to investigate how organizations deal with the challenges to moral legitimacy posed by some audiences. In their study of Keystone, a social enterprise supporting immigrants, Tracey and Phillips (2016) suggested that challenged organizations may engage in *advocacy* to build internal support and justify the organization's alignment with the source of stigma (in this case: Eastern European immigrants), and *valorization* to help organizational members to see the pride in the organization's activities. Similarly, Helmes and Patterson (2014) found that mixed martial arts organizations (MMA heretofore) *coopted negative labels* to gain the awareness of supportive audiences and *corrected negative evaluations* held by critical audiences through altering those activities that were the focus of negative evaluations and persuading critical audiences to more positively evaluate the MMA organizations. Finally, Hampel and Tracey (2017) found that Thomas Cook, the travel agent that invented organized tours for the masses in Victorian Britain and was stigmatized by the elites who saw its activities as "morally object," eradicated the stigma by showing that the organization's activity was not harmful to the dominant upper-class and played in fact a positive role in society.

In the case of cultural entrepreneurs mobilizing morally tainted cultural resources, different strategies may be required. While prior studies have focused on organizations in which stigma originated from moral taint associated to their core activities (in Thomas Cook and MMA organizations) or the people the organizations associated with (in Keystone), the examples we have offered suggest that the enterprises

mobilizing morally tainted cultural resources had at their core non-morally tainted activities (e.g., a restaurant, a museum, a clothing design) and lacked any actual association with morally tainted actors (e.g., no relationship with actual mobsters, serial-killers and genocide-perpetrators, respectively).

On the one hand, such different characteristics may shield enterprises mobilizing morally tainted cultural resources from some of the serious fall-outs affecting organizations like Thomas Cook and Keystone. For example, *showing the benefits to society*, a strategy employed by Thomas Cook to legitimate its activity, may be unnecessary in the case of enterprises leveraging morally tainted cultural resources because the morality of these ventures' activities is not questioned. On the other hand, such features may call for different strategies all together or for adapting existing ones. For example, future research could investigate *how* the strategy *correcting negative evaluation*, mobilized by the MMA organizations to change the mind of external critical audiences, can be enacted to change audiences' perception of what is morally tainted.

Finally, scholars could examine whether *different shades of moral taint* require ventures to engage in different strategies for dealing with associated fall-outs. It might be the case that some cultural elements cannot be rehabilitated, as for example, the swastika. But others may not be strongly and unequivocally opposed, such as the Hollywood interpretations of mafia stories. Similarly, there might be *variability in the number and power of critical audiences*. Again, the use of swastika seems to be objected almost unanimously in the Western world, with the exception of neo-Nazi groups. On the contrary, the only audiences feeling offended by the trivialization of mafia-related names, stories, and symbols in the Spanish franchise were the Italian people. Future work could examine whether and how such variability affects audiences' opposition and how cultural entrepreneurs can react effectively.

Making moral taint distinctive. Finally, an intriguing area of investigation concerns not only how cultural entrepreneurs mobilize morally tainted resources and deal with associated fall-outs, but also how they can transform morally tainted resources into something attractive and *cool* that underpins the venture's distinctiveness. Coolness is a positive evaluation of an entity associated either to nonconformity to established norms (e.g. Heath & Potter, 2004) or to conformity to norms of particular subcultures that deviate from generally accepted norms (O'Donnell & Wardlow, 2000). More generally, coolness relates to

the extent to which one shows “willingness to pursue one’s own course irrespective of the norms, beliefs and expectations of others” (Warren & Campbell, 2014). Making products cool has been shown to help organizations distinguish themselves effectively from peers, as the cases of Harley Davidson (Holt, 2004) and Apple (Interbrand, 2014).

In some instances, organizations have transformed products from tainted to cool. An example is offered by producers of grappa that transformed a spirit previously associated with working classes and drunkenness and thus perceived as morally tainted, into a cool spirit “associated with Italian subalpine culture” that upper classes came to enjoy and paid a premium for (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016, 521). Such a transformation has significant consequences for organizations. In the example of grappa, a whole new category of grappa producers emerged, the so-called “purists” that distinguished themselves effectively from others through creating distilling standards and lobbying for their collective interests.

Future research could investigate to what extent cultural entrepreneurs can transform morally tainted resources into a cool organizational offering and identity. The Spanish restaurant franchise could be described as “cool” by some audiences — certainly this was the first reaction of some of our non-Italian colleagues when we described the franchise’s identity. The extent to which this is possible may depend on how strongly offending the mobilized resources are perceived to be, and therefore it relates to the shade of taint and the ways in which ventures mobilize such resources (discussed above). Understanding these processes may be a particularly intriguing avenue of investigation as it promises to shed new light on a central issue for entrepreneurship, which is how ventures attain optimal distinctiveness by balancing the need for attaining legitimacy among multiple audiences with the need for being distinctive (Navis and Glynn, 2010; Tracey et al., forthcoming).

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Table 1: Illustrative examples of morally tainted cultural enterprises

	La Mafia se sienta a la mesa	Jack the Ripper Museum	KA Design
Types of cultural resource used	Names of real mafia-mobsters, symbols and pictures from “The Godfather” movies define the venture’s identity.	Story and symbols of the 19th century serial-killer define the venture’s identity.	Swastika, rainbow, and words “peace,” “love” and “zen” characterize a new product line.
Audiences’ assessment of cultural resources	“Offensive,” “manipulating,” and “repugnant” for the Italian government, members of Parliament, the Anti-mafia Commission, the media, and a restaurant guide. Attractive to customers in Spain.	“Repugnant” for feminist groups, the media, academics and local politicians. Attractive to museum visitors.	“Obscene and disgusting” for representatives of the Jews community and the media. Attractive to neo-Nazi groups.
ience’s reactions			
Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report by an Italian daily shames the venture. Members of Italian parliament bring the matter to the attention of the Parliament and the Anti-Mafia Commission. Touring Club, a restaurant guidebook, delists the franchise from its book. The Italian government applies to the European Union Intellectual Protection Office to cancel the trademark. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Petition to change the nature and the identity of the museum reaches 13.000 signatures. Retroactive refusal to grant planning permission for the museum’s shop front. Local politicians expressing dissatisfaction for not being able to shut down the museum. Encouraging museum boycott. Advertising rival exhibition next to museum. Assaulting museum’s employees verbally and physically. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative coverage in the press and social- media against KA Design and the US online platform Teespring that sold the T-shirts.
Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive evaluation on TripAdvisor (4/5 stars for most restaurants). Finalist in several industry awards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive evaluation on TripAdvisor (4/5 stars rating) TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence 2017. High number of on-line reviews for a peripheral museum (>400). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Praise by head of neo-Nazi group. Sporadic social media references to the fact that Swastika is auspicious symbol in Hindi religion.
Venture’s reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Claiming cultural references are from movies and have a great appeal in Spain. Removing many mafia symbols, including references to real mobsters. Appealing against EUIPO’s decision to withdraw protection of the trademark. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removing offensive signage, e.g., skull and crossbones motif, after the ruling of the Tower Hamlets Council. Hiring an all-female advisory board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Justifying good intentions. Releasing a new version with a swastika crossed over. Withdrawing product line.

