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Born to blossom, bloom, then perish? The rise and fall of the *Pomells de Joventut de Catalunya* (1920–1923)

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ABSTRACT

The activities, outputs, and histories of youth organisations across a range of contexts can give us a privileged understanding of later political movements that find their roots with those youth movements. Scholars have already paid a great deal of attention to youth movements as part of totalitarian regimes, revolutionary and rebellious factions, as well as weird and wonderful cults. However, our understanding of the realities and impact of youth groups tied to minoritised language movements in Iberia remains underdeveloped and fails to reflect on the agency of youth. In the case of Catalonia – the focus of this article – a number of youth groups emerged in the delicate, and politically fraught period between Spain’s disastrous defeat at hands of the United States in 1898 and the sudden rise of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923–1930). Nearing the end of this timeline, the *Pomells de Joventut de Catalunya* (1920–1923) were one such organisation that sprung up to serve both God and Catalonia, a combination which would garner interest from the Catalan elite but also single them out for annihilation at hands of Spanish nationalism. This article seeks to disclose the history of the *Pomells*, their wider networks and relations to the power structures of the day, how young people made the organisation their own through small actions, and, finally, the demise and afterlives of the organisation.

KEYWORDS

Youth movements;
Catalonia; Catholicism; Primo de Rivera; Interwar Youth

Introduction

Amidst the 1920s’ narratives of boom and bust, social advancement, and creeping Fascism, the (hi)story of youth is central to setting the scene for the bloodshed and devastation that would cut across mainland Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. Scholarship on youth publications from a number of different national contexts (Allen 2014, 195–217; Nic Congáil 2009, 91–117; Tager 1992, 271–290) point to the political promises and potential of print culture during this time, signalling that change was in the air across different languages and geographies. Scholars in Catalan Studies have, to date, paid much attention to the role of Catalan-speaking youth in the scout movements that appeared throughout the Catalan Countries (Cerdà 1999; Font i Palma 2002; Roma i Casanovas

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2008), and these investigations often point to the important role played by such organisations in preserving and fostering the use of Catalan. However, this particular focus loses sight of other youth groups that took root in Catalonia during the same period – particularly those which would be doomed and undone by external forces. To complicate matters further, very little scholarly attention has been given to the role of youth in leading cultural movements in Catalonia, and there is a tendency to place a greater emphasis on the role of adult individuals, and their role in managing youth organisations. This is a problematic framing as it denies young people agency and initiative, depicting them as innocent lambs following orders, and fails to consider their own voices and choices.

In this article, I seek to outline the swift development and precipitous demise of a short-lived but widespread Catholic, Catalan youth group, the *Pomells de Joventut de Catalunya* (the Garlands of Youth of Catalonia, hereinafter referred to as the *Pomells*), which existed from late 1920 to late 1923. To supplement this, I focus on the different ways the *Pomells* articulate agency and negotiate power. Any discussion of youth agency, as highlighted by White and Wyn (1998, 325), ought to include an analysis of the kinds of agency available to young people. Similar views, about the pressing need for researchers to better define agency amongst youth, are echoed by Lancy (2012), and these problems in the literature have been further categorised into specific “traps” by Gleason (2016, 447). Souto Kustrín (2007, 181) echoes these concerns, noting that only specific sections of youth have been considered, leaving gaps in our understanding of youth “de clase media” and the other social dimensions that shape youth identities. In response to the work of these scholars, this article also looks to developments in Catalan society, particularly amongst the upper classes, and the various factions vying for control within Catholic Church, as these are key to the *Pomells*’ fall from grace and their undoing. I will also point out various initiatives taken up by the members of the *Pomells* themselves, and how this engagement shows that young Catalans were dictating the course of the organisation, albeit with approval from adults above. By taking these developments and trends into consideration, I seek to determine whether the *Pomells* were simply the accidental victims of a vicious culture war as Spain clamped down on democracy, an easy sacrifice paid in exchange for the protection of the political elite in the face of a new dictatorship, or rather a singled-out target for the ravenous jaws of an insidious Spanish Nationalism. Navigating a damaged historical archive, wherein the voices of Catalan youth are few and far between, and even those that do surface are often mediated, I argue that agency amongst the *Pomells* can be found in the so-called mundane details that we may tend to overlook, those small acts that articulate identity, such as fashions and rituals or events, social networks and interactions with the powerful institutions of the day, as well as the fleeting notes of linguistic resistance.

A seed is planted: the beginnings of the Pomells

At the start of the twentieth century, Josep Maria Folch i Torres (1880–1950) was becoming a major driving force behind Catalan-language children’s books, plays, and publications aimed at youth. In 1904, aged just twenty-four, but with a handful of publications already under his belt, Folch began contributing to *En Patufet*, a Catalan-language magazine that catered for younger readers. Casasús (2015, 64) notes that *En Patufet* was

“the most important” publication for children and teenagers, and that, through the magazine, Folch was instrumental in teaching generations of young Catalans how to read and write in their own language. However, after some sixteen years of contributing to *En Patufet*, Folch would go one step further, moving within and beyond the publication to create a new youth group, *Els Pomells de Joventut de Catalunya*. The readership of *En Patufet*, serving as a direct line to Catalan-speaking youth across Catalonia, would be the ideal target for spreading an awareness of the *Pomells*. However, it was only in 1920, in a brief note in the issue of *En Patufet* from the 9th of October (589–590), that Folch finally planted a seed:

Amics volguts: Jo voldria que en cada poble, en cada indret, en cada escola, en cada entitat, oficina, despatx o magatzem de la nostra Catalunya o d’allí on sigui que s’hi trobin aplegats almenys cinc amics patufistes, s’hi formés un <<Pomell de Joventut>>, amb una paraula donada, entre ells, de realitzar, individualment o col·lectiva, cada setmana si més sovint no, dues obres bones: una virtuosa, altra patriòtica. Una bona paraula a un company menyspreat, un acte d’humilitat, de generositat, d’heroisme, de caritat, d’amor i de respecte a pares i mestres.etc., seran actes grats a Déu. Un exercici diari o sovintejat de lectura i escriptura en català: una observació discreta als que per descuit parlen malament el nostre idioma, una indicació o un prec respectuós al mestre per a que estableixi ensenyaments en català, d’història i de gramàtica catalanes especialment, etc., seran actes agradables a la Pàtria. D’aquestes bones obres els <<Pomells de Joventut>> podrien dur-ne registres on anotar-les. Una reglamentació especial podria, tal volta, unificar per a aquests bons fins l’acció de tots els <<Pomells>> de Catalunya... En el meu cap i en el meu cor hi és quasi feta aquesta organització de les joventuts primerenques. En el meu somniar la veig tornant a la nostra Catalunya la pau i l’espiritualitat que les convulsions d’ara semblen voler arrebar-li. Ara ja està dit. Que la iniciativa voli i que el Bon Àngel l’acompanyi.

Dear friends: In every town, in every place, in every school, in every organisation, office, workplace or shop in our Catalonia, or anywhere that five friends of *En Patufet* are found, I want them to form a *Pomell de Joventut* (a Garland of Youth) with a promise between them to carry out, individually or as a group, two good works every week, if not more often: an act of virtue, and an act of patriotism. A kind word to a rejected companion, an act of humility, of generosity, of heroism, of charity, of love and of respect for parents and teachers.etc. are all acts that please God. A daily or frequent exercise in reading and writing in Catalan: a discreet remark to those who, through carelessness, speak our language poorly, a suggestion or a respectful request to the teacher to deliver lessons in Catalan, especially Catalan history and grammar, etc., will please the Motherland. The “*Pomells de Joventut*” could keep records of these good works where they can be noted down. A special regulation could, perhaps, unify the action of all the “*Pomells*” of Catalonia for these good ends... In my head and in my heart, this organisation of early youth is nearly done. In my dreams, I see this organisation bringing back to our Catalonia the peace and spirituality that the current convulsions seem to want to take away from her.

I’ve said my part. Let this initiative take flight and may the Guardian Angel watch over it.

What triggered this decision to launch a youth organisation remains a mystery. However, shortly after issuing his call, we can see that Folch’s appeal had ignited the youth of Catalonia. By the printing of the next issue of *En Patufet*, from the 27th of November (1920) (702), Folch i Torres joyfully notes that twelve branches of the *Pomells* had already sprung up. The majority of these groups were focused on Barcelona and its immediate surroundings, including nearby Sabadell, Sant Feliu de Llobregat, and Sitges, as well as a few sites beyond the city, such as Sant Sadurn de Noia and, further afield, in Lleida.

In this first wave of *Pomells* expansion, despite Folch's open invitation to the entirety of Catalan youth, we can see youth agency at play as some of the first branches mentioned in *En Patufet* are already marked as "de senyoretetes" (for young ladies). This dividing of the sexes was then adopted by the movement as it began to take shape, and it was made an essential part of the organisation in its statutes through the first article (*L'esperit dels Pomells de Joventut*, 1921, 25):

Primera. Els <<Pomells de la Joventut>> seran constituïts per un nombre indeterminat de joves o noies, no inferior a cinc, que hagin convingut o convinguin realitzar, per l'amor a Déu i de la Pàtria, una obra de virtut i un acte patriòtic, si més sovint no, cada setmana, ja sia cada un particularment, ja col·lectivament.

One: The "Pomells de la Joventut" will be made up of any number of young boys or girls, although no fewer than five members, who have agreed or agree to carry out, through love for God and for Catalonia, an act of virtue and an act of patriotism every week, if not more often, either individually or as a group.

Although the motives for Folch's sudden decision to start the *Pomells* are unclear, his commitment to Catholic and Catalan values are evident through his memberships in organisations, such as the *Lliga del Bon Mot* (League of the Good Word, which would also later be banned alongside the *Pomells*) and his close friendships with the Catalan cultural elite. Within Catholic circles, Folch was also a member of the *Lliga Espiritual de la Mare de Déu de Montserrat* (Spiritual League of Our Lady of Montserrat), an organisation which first began in 1899 and continues to this day.¹ Whilst his commitment to the youth is difficult to trace, Folch's links to Catalanism are more evident and are in keeping with a wider trend within Catalan society. 1898 serves a pivotal year in Catalan history as, in the wake of Spain's disastrous war with the USA and the loss of key overseas territories, the reeling Catalan elite appear to drift into two distinct camps: one that continued to have hope in the idea of Spain and saw Catalonia as part of that crusade, oftentimes as part of a driving force; and another which became disillusioned with Empire and sought a distinctly Catalan alternative. Whilst strikingly different from one another, there were obvious areas relating to Catalan culture where these two camps could certainly agree and reach compromises. Folch i Torres, as Pérez Vallverdú (2009, 21) notes, found himself in the latter camp, opting for a more radical Catalanism, with a deep cultural core pulsating through it. In this sense, as a Catholic and Catalan organisation, the *Pomells* were able to tap into the hopes of several segments of Catalan society, and this could well explain the organisation's popularity. Women from the Catalan elite, with clear cultural, political, and economic ties, through marriage or wider family networks, also flocked to the *Pomells* in order to lend their support in whatever capacity they could. This group included: Josepa Dachs i Carné, the widow of the Catalan politician, Prat de la Riba; Clara Noble i Malvido (1872–1944), the widow of the Catalan poet, Joan Maragall; as well as Assumpció Tapis de Guarro, and Maria Camarasa i Serra.²

By reading through *Àmfora* (Amphora), the *Pomells* monthly magazine, the links between the various organisations of which Folch i Torres was part become much clearer.³ For example, in various issues of *Àmfora*, we come across articles that reflect and expand the activities of other organisations, such as the *Lliga del Bon Mot*. The *Lliga* was well known for its anti-cursing campaigns, summoning the self-righteous to turn on those who swore and used blasphemous exclamations in their speech, and these activities

became topics for discussion and reflection in a number of articles and campaigns promoted by the *Pomells* through *Àmfora*. Although it did have a young following of its own, the *Lliga* was also an exercise in class politics, offering the Catalan bourgeoisie an opportunity to mock and chastise those who, in their eyes, were lowly beings who had to turn to so-called foul language in order to express themselves. Through *Àmfora*, Folch was allowing these campaigns to spread from beyond the upper levels of Catalan society to penetrate a variety of social contexts wherever the *Pomells* themselves could be found. Individual members of the *Pomells* would then take this social control a step further. In the June, (1922) (1922d) (21) issue of *Àmfora*, one youth describes his shock and dismay at hearing another child singing a lewd song in Castilian. Regrettably, we are not told what the song is as the writer refuses to repeat the lyrics, but he tells the other child “que es tornaria lleig si la cantava” (he would become ugly if he sang that song), and proceeds to teach the child a Catalan lullaby, *El noi de la mare* (*Àmfora*, June 1922, 21). Other Catholic entities in neighbouring Aragon, as noted by Blasco Herranz (2017, 47), in the early twentieth century, such as the female-led *la Corte de Honor de Zaragoza*, ran similar campaigns against blasphemy and protested secular schooling, indicating a greater blending of devotional fervour and a sense of social responsibility. It is interesting to observe that whilst the *Pomells'* anti-cursing campaign was confined to the pages of *Àmfora*, large-scale protests, as observed by Cruz (1998, 142), and which were a relatively new form of political action in Spain, against blasphemy were becoming commonplace in the early twentieth century.

A surging seedling: the rise of the *Pomells*

The rapid growth of the *Pomells* is staggering when we consider the organisation's short existence. At the very start, in December, 1920, there were 20 groups in total, and the majority of these were located in the city of Barcelona, with several focused on the more affluent neighbourhoods. By 1921, approximately 270 groups had sprung up, and in 1922, this reached a total of 729 groups. On the eve of the dissolution of the *Pomells*, in late 1923, there were 849 groups. 278 of these were found in Barcelona and its environs, alongside 352 groups outside the city, spread across the province of Barcelona. However, the movement was not limited to the urban centres. There were 108 groups in the province of Girona, 45 in the province of Tarragona, 41 in the province of Lleida, and further groups outside of Catalonia, such as *Pom de Roselles* in Madrid, *Catalans d'Amèrica* in Argentina, and *Flaires de Brasil* in Brazil. It is frustrating to note that no surviving records give any indications as to how many members took part in the *Pomells*. Estimating the total number of members is, as Sampere i Ministrat (1994, 17) suggests, “pràcticament impossible.” For example, in Malgrat de Mar (in the province of Barcelona), there were three groups: Montserrat, Sant Lluís de Gonzaga, and Violetes Llevantines. As each group needed a minimum of five members, we can assume that there were at least fifteen members in total. Sampere i Ministrat (1994, 17), however, points out that across these three groups the total number of members was “a la vora de cent” (around one hundred). In a commemorative pamphlet (de Ajuntament 2002, 1), issued by the village of Begur, located in the province of Girona, it is reported that the *Pomells* were a popular part of everyday life, noting that “gairebé tota la mainada del poble en formà part” (almost all of the children in the village were part of the *Pomells*). The inclusion of so many children in

this rural context seems to suggest that the *Pomells*, in some areas, were able to transcend socio-economic divisions.

The *Pomells* were, nevertheless, much more than a phenomenon limited to Catalonia. A number of Catalan-language periodicals mention the growth of the movement in far-flung outposts in what was once Spain's global empire, and these sources prove vital in understanding numbers of members and geographic spread. In the December, 1921, issue of *Ressorgiment* (1032), a Catalan-language magazine printed in Argentina, it is reported by Jordi Català that the *Pomells'* first communion mass in the Church of Saint Anna, in central Barcelona, drew in 200 members. Another article in that same issue (*Ressorgiment*, December, 1921, 1042) excitedly announces the creation of a new branch of the *Pomells* in Buenos Aires, bringing the movement to the Catalan diaspora in Argentina. This is confirmed in the January 1922 issue of *Ressorgiment* (1057–58), and a further branch, the *Flaires de Brasil*, in Pelotas (Rio Grande do Sul) is mentioned in the April 1922 issue of *La Nova Catalunya* (52). However, documentation concerning these branches has not yet surfaced, leaving the Latin American aspect of the *Pomells* wanting. To complicate matters, within the pages of *Àmfora*, the *Pomells'* own publication in Catalonia, we find very little information about these branches in Latin America. As noted in the May 1922 issue of *Àmfora* (69–70), the *Pomells* were certainly on the charm offensive when they greeted Francesc Fàbrega i Amat, who ran the *Escola Pia* (Piarist School) in Cuba and Mexico, on his visit to Barcelona.⁴ Throughout the history of *Àmfora*, we also see direct contributions from Latin America thanks to the pen of Lluís G. Fàbrega i Amat, a Catalan journalist. As has been noted by Jerez Columbié (2021, 27), Fàbrega i Amat was also publishing articles in other Catalan-language publications in South America, such as *La Nova Catalunya* (1908–1932). In the December, 1922 issue of *Àmfora* (25), we come across a photo of Fàbrega i Amat's son, dressed in *Pomells* attire. There is no mention of a Peruvian branch in the currently available sources, and the possibility of a Peruvian branch requires further investigation.

Bursting into blossom: fashioning the *Pomells* for life and death

One of the key characteristics that would define members of the *Pomells* was the devout wardrobe associated with the organisation. In particular, female members of the *Pomells* were encouraged to wear white hoods when attending Church. In the September 1921 issue of *En Patufet* (679), in an article penned by J. S., the *Flors d'Ametllers* branch from Sant Gervasi, an affluent district of Barcelona, are identified as the trend setters for this garment. The article (*ibid*, 680) notes that the girls from the local *Pomells* branch admired the typical dress adorned by Catalan women from mountainous areas and sought to bring this style into the urban space. However, whilst the girls are lauded for embracing traditional symbols, it is the religious aspect of this simple garment, its ability to ensure the girls do not elicit looks nor that they are fixated on their appearances, that warrants great praise according to the article. In addition to fashioning the garment as part of the *Pomells* wardrobe, the *Flors d'Ametllers* branch make clear their commitment to the success of the organisation by offering, via the article (*En Patufet*, September 1921, 680–681) in *En Patufet*, to send hoods to other branches of the *Pomells*. Given that the organisation had only around 200 members at this point, such provisions could

be provided for within reason. Furthermore, the article (*En Patufet*, September 1921, 680) states that any girl who is about to undergo First Communion should be given a hood, as both an act of faith and of patriotism. The article was written in preparation for the one-year anniversary of the organisation, which would be celebrated with a mass in the new Church of Saint Anne, in central Barcelona. On the 9th of October, 1921 (2), as reported the following day in the Spanish-language newspaper *La Publicidad*, it is noted that the majority of the *Pomells* were wearing their white hoods for the event. It is impossible to determine whether the article in *En Patufet* had any direct influence in triggering this change in the wardrobe of the *Pomells*, but it is clear that the hood had now become associated with the movement. The hood did, however, take some time before catching on. Sampere i Ministrat (1994, 17) notes that, in the case of the *Pomells* groups in Malgrat, the hood was not part of their usual attire until May, 1922. This sudden change in costume was to do with the *Festival Pomellista*, a special inaugural party thrown by the local branches, at which all of the girls would wear their hoods, whilst boys wore their barretinas, and all of the children wore a blue ribbon (Sampere i Ministrat 1994, 27). Josep Maria Folch i Torres also attended the event, and was met with members of the local branches of the *Pomells* who led the celebrations, contributing their own poems, prayers, and performances (Sampere i Ministrat 1994, 29).

In the January, 1922 issue of *Àmfora*, an entire article (10), titled “La Caputxa Triomfant” (The Triumphant Hood), the wearing of this religious garment is celebrated, but the writer also reminds readers that the hood should be worn everywhere, not just at Mass. Whilst the white hood had a clear Judeo-Christian meaning, working as both a symbol of piety and purity, the writer of the article also declares it to be “una prova de catalanitat” (*Àmfora*, January 1922, 10), making it a new symbol of the wearer’s Catalan identity. This point (*Àmfora*, January 1922, 12) is further enforced with a rhetorical question from the writer: “No volem ésser els millors i els més fermes patriotes?” (Don’t we want to be the best and most fervent patriots?). The hood was also adopted by the Madrid branch of the *Pomells*, and again we see that the hood is referred to, by a magazine started by the *Pomells* group in Montsacopa (Olot), as the “catalaníssima caputxeta” (*Esplais Literaris*, April 1923, 22). These terms reflect another transformation in the garment’s visual grammar, starting out as rural clothing, then elevated to a symbol of spiritual purity for the *Pomells*, and now it had come full circle to become a national symbol of sorts for Catalan identity.

The barretina, as part of boys’ costume, had already acquired cultural currency within Catalan nationalism and expressions of identity. It was worn by the celebrated Catalan poet, Jacint Verdaguer, in 1865, when he attended the *Jocs Florals* to collect a prize.⁵ Verdaguer’s decision to dress as a Catalan peasant was not a feckless fancy, but rather a very deliberate statement. As noted by Cattini and Santacana (2017, 243–244), Verdaguer’s “youthful image was living proof of a popular Catalan culture that was vibrant, noble, far removed from the customs of the city, and still untainted at its core.” By the early twentieth century, as Catalan *Modernisme* collided with *Noucentisme*, the barretina would be one of the casualties in the clash of these two artistic movements. Xavier Fàbregas (1978, 206), in his book on the history of Catalan theatre, notes that *Noucentisme* favoured order and discipline, prioritising the fast and aggressive city space

over the once favoured idyllic countryside, and as a result, cultural items and symbols of identity from rural Catalonia, such as “la faixa i la barretina,” fell to the wayside. Shortly after the fall of the *Pomells*, the barretina would be evoked by Joan Miró in his 1925 series, *Cap de pagès català/Head of a Catalan Peasant* (1925), reflecting its importance within Catalan symbology. These garments, as markers of identity for the *Pomells*, are noticeable in the writing of Alexandre Cirici i Pellicer (1972, 103), who reflects on his childhood, stating: “A l’escola vam ésser tots rabiosos militants de l’antipomell, l’antibarretina, de l’anticaputxa” (At school, we were all fervent militants of the anti-Pomells, anti-Barretina, anti-Hood ilk).

The *Pomells*’ deployment of fashion in this manner was, undoubtedly, a “social and embodied process of negotiation” (Kaiser and Green 2021, 1) as they embraced rural Catalan fashions and then brought them into the most well-heeled urban spaces in Barcelona, imbued them with meaning by linking these garments to religious practice, and then normalised and commodified the hood through the magazine, *Àmfora*, and through events, such as weekly masses and specific *Pomells*-oriented events. This was, by and large, culture from above as it was a specific branch from a well to do area that started the trend, but it does show that the *Pomells*, at least where deploying meaning through fashion was concerned, did have agency on some level and were making the movement their own. This trend was then picked up by the adults running the organisation, and further legitimised by the Catholic Church. However, I would argue that it was through texts and photographs, such as those found in *Àmfora* and *En Patufet*, as well as visual displays in the public sphere, by attending mass or specific *Pomells* events, that the hood was then solidified as part of the *Pomells*’ visual grammar.

The hood was so powerful as an identity marker that, in some instances, it would begin to take on further ceremonial value and meaning for members of the *Pomells*. In the issue of *Àmfora*, dated to 15th April, (1922) (1922b) (20), it is reported that the recently deceased Maria Ferret i Sanahuja, from the *Pomells* group in Reus, requested that, if she were to die, then she should be dressed in her hood. Her last wishes were respected and, underneath the photograph of Maria in her white hood, dressed as an immaculate bride of Christ, the magazine acknowledges this garment as a dignified item for entering Heaven above. As the article goes on to report, Maria was not alone in her decision to wear her veil when buried. Another member of the *Pomells*, Maria Guarro, from Barcelona, also asked to be buried in her hood, as a sign of her purity and devotion to God. In these two related cases, it is clear that individual members of the *Pomells* had adopted symbols of the organisation and were now adding further meaning to them by incorporating them as part of their funerary dress. There was no instruction from Folch or any suggestions in previous issues of *Àmfora* that girls should be dressed in their hoods for burial. From these first instances, a new trend would begin to emerge as the hood became part of funerary dress for the *Pomells*. The obituary in the June, (1922) (1922d), issue of *Àmfora*, states that Mercè Huguet i Guinart (41), who died in Barcelona at the age of nineteen, also wished to be buried in her hood. In that same issue, it is noted that Ramona Carratalà, from the rural town of Folgueroles, was also interred in the garment in keeping with her final wish. In the August, (1922) (1922e) issue (33), the obituary for the fourteen year-old María Alemany, the President of a *Pomells*’ group in Sabadell, notes she also requested to be buried in her hood, as a sign of “sant orgull i vera pietat” (holy pride and true piety).

Within the sobering obituaries of deceased members of the *Pomells*, we do find some instances of humour – and the hood becomes a vehicle in its deployment. In the November (1922) issue (29), the obituary notes the death of five-year-old Anna Pi i Turu, from Castellbisbal, who was also buried in her hood. Perhaps as light relief, the obituary (*Àmfora*, November 1922, 29) reports that, as her death quickened, she asked her mother: “Mare, al cel, que no hi haurà un lloc per penjar la caputxeta?” (Mother, will there be a place in Heaven to hang up my hood?). Members of the *Pomells* were expressing agency in their own incorporation and deployment of the hood, articulating their membership of the organisation, whilst also adding to church ritual through the garment. Within a wider Iberian and European context, the *Pomells* decision to invest in traditional, religious garments as an expression of identity was not unusual. For example, in the Basque context of the early twentieth century, Ruiz Descamps (2010, 205–208) points to the importance of music, as well as the revival of neglected Basque instruments, to the *Juventud Vasca* in expressing their identity and politics. At the end of the nineteenth century, the development of Gaelic games in Ireland was seen as part of imbuing the next generation with a “patriotic nationalist spirit” (McElligott 2019, 335). And, as Nic Congáil (2022, 135) shows, this was further enhanced through the promotion of certain garments for young people in the Irish context.

Seedlings searching for light: the Pomells, the Catholic Church in Catalonia, and their critics

Given the Catholic nature of the *Pomells*, one would assume that they would be natural allies of the Church. However, this relationship was not always an easy one. The Catholic Church within Catalonia and Spain had been undergoing a number of changes during the start of the twentieth century and in the lead up to the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. For a start, structures of power and chains of command were beginning to rust and be replaced. A lay apostolate had been spurred into action in 1881 by Cardinal Moreno. Various Catholic congresses were called for by Cardinal Sancha between 1889 and 1902 in various parts of Spain, with one taking place in Tarragona in 1894. None of these attempts were particularly fruitful and, as Lannon notes (Lannon 1987, 147), “pastoral plans became hopelessly entangled in political controversies.” In her observation, Lannon also attributes these failures to the “extreme, irreconcilable Right” (Lannon 1987, 147). One body that managed to be born of these futile attempts, *Acción Católica* (Catholic Action), is lambasted by Lannon as “little more than a ritual lament that things were as they were” (Lannon 1987, 148). As Catholicism sought to re-define itself and adapt to the new century, the Church would turn to the youth for its continuation. This could explain why particular elements of the Catholic Church met the *Pomells* with such eagerness.

The *Pomells* would be seen as a solution, to some extent, to the issues that plagued Catalonia in the early twentieth century. Within the pluralistic denominations of Catalan nationalism at the dawn of the twentieth century, there was an ongoing debate regarding the role and position of the Catholic Church. As Codinachs i Verdaguer (1990, 45) highlights, the Church had aligned itself more closely to “*catalanisme essencial*,” a system that maintained old(er) power structures, which left it at odds with the forces of “*catalanisme existencial*,” those explosive elements that focused on new social ideologies: Federalism, Republicanism, Socialism, Marxism, and Anarchism. As De la Cueva (2022, 103) posits, the

Catholic Church, within the Spanish State, had sought to cultivate “an antiliberal, anti-socialist, and counterrevolutionary discourse.” In this same vein, Christian Catalanism, as noted by Codinachs i Verdaguer (1990, 45–46), was aware that devastating confrontations with other forces on this pluralistic playing field were not just possibilities, but rather guarantees; a question of “when,” rather than “if.” Whilst anti-clericalism was reaching new heights within Spanish society, as noted by Álvarez Junco (1990, 401–414), a string of events in Catalonia, such as Lerroux’s (1906) open call to take up arms against the Catholic Church, as articulated in his article “¡Rebeldes, rebeldes!,” and the 1909 *Setmana Tràgica*, which saw an outpouring of rage and violence against religious building and associated property, made it clear that the Church and its clergy had progressed from being lampooned in the press to becoming the prime targets of political violence. In order to triumph in any upcoming conflict, the Church would need an army of the faithful, and this is why the *Pomells* were seen by some as a blessing. An emphasis on a Christian Catalonia, one that would be carried forward by children and young people, reverberates through Bishop Josep Torres i Bages’ appeal (22 February, 1910, cited in Codinachs i Verdaguer 1990, 48) that addressed his local congregation:

Els bons ciutadans, quan amen Catalunya, si volen la seva continuació entre els pobles dignes i lliures, han de reclamar contra el projecte de separar Déu de l’educació de la infància i de la joventut, perquè això significaria que Catalunya deixaria de ser cristiana. I aleshores Catalunya no seria catalana, perquè Catalunya la féu el Cristianisme i la seva naturalesa és cristiana.

The good citizens, who love Catalonia, if they want to see Catalonia continue on between the noble and free peoples, have to stand up against the project to remove God from the education provided to children and young people, because such a move would mean that Catalonia would no longer be Christian. Such a Catalonia would not be Catalan, because Catalonia is shaped through Christianity and her nature is Christian.

That same year, Torres i Bages would go on to openly condemn the idea of the secular school in his book, *El hombre mutilado por la escuela neutra* (1910). Throughout the early twentieth century, as Kössler (2009, 2) notes, the school was seen by the Church as its “traditional domain.” However, De la Cueva (2003, 200) acknowledges that whilst religious education was a matter of contention, other matters, such as wars in Europe and Morocco, as well as political tussles, took precedence from 1913 onwards. In their publications, the school is not framed by the *Pomells* as a battleground for religious instruction, but rather as a space to be reclaimed for the Catalan language. Numerous articles in *Àmfora* urge readers to campaign for a greater use of the language in their schools, but reflections concerning the place of faith in schools are far more limited. Whilst the *Pomells* instantly wed their goals to Catholicism without much explanation, other youth Catalans groups had to state arguments for such a link. For example, in the June, 1921, issue of the *Butlletí de les Joventuts Nacionalistes de Catalunya*, this struggle to accommodate Catholicism within Catalanism is explained thoroughly to Catalan youth (8–11).

The *Pomells*’ blossoming relationship with the Catholic Church reached a curious peak, as demonstrated on the front page of the June (1922) (1922d) issue of *Àmfora*. His Holiness, the newly elected Pope Pius XI, had sent a telegram to Folch i Torres in which he blessed the *Pomells* and commended them on their efforts. However, this papal communication was not born of thin air, but was rather the fruit of Folch i Torres’ own interactions with the Holy See as news was sent to Rome in the wake of the *Festa dels 500*

Pomells at Montserrat. The event, as noted triumphantly in *Àmfora* (June 1922, 5), had in fact lured in 700 groups from across Catalonia, and was met with great celebration by the Catholic Church. Flags from the *Pomells* branches were blessed by throngs of priests, key figures of the Church gave speeches, children performed songs and dances, and chocolates were provided by a businessman in Sant Celoni. This divine seal of approval would have serious political clout as Francesc Cambó i Batlle, the leader of the *Lliga Regionalista*, directly approached Folch i Torres about aligning the *Pomells* with his party.⁶ Surprisingly, despite the party's alignment with Catalanism, Folch i Torres turned down the request. This rejection invites speculation as to whether such a political alignment would have compromised the activities, relations, or even the essence of the *Pomells* as it could have been seen as a prioritisation of their Catalan identity over their Catholic one.

Elements within the Catholic Church had acknowledged and, indeed, encouraged the activities of the *Pomells*, but that did not mean that everyone in the institution was on their side. The relationship between the *Pomells* and the Church has also been misinterpreted. For example, in his analysis of the group's swift demise, Quiroga (2007, 51) claims that the *Pomells* were "controlled by the Church." However, this argument fails to acknowledge how the Church was part and parcel of everyday life for many young people in Catalonia. Compulsory education was delivered by the Catholic Church. The Church was committed to providing an education based on, as Revuelta González (2001, 251) puts it, "virtud y letras." The *Pomells'* own insistence on Catholic virtue, through their textual output and social rituals, was nothing new to their members, but rather it reinforced the messages they had acquired in other social arenas, such as the education system and wider society. Furthermore, the group's religious reverence did not necessarily mean they were received well by the wider institution of the Catholic Church. In 1922, as the *Pomells* continued to rise, Ginebra i Serrabou (2006, 272) notes that Josep Miralles i Sbert, the bishop of Lleida from 1914 to 1925, refused to bless the flag of the local *Pomells* branch. Rather than being a simple snub that could be brushed off and forgotten, the slight became newsworthy. One journalist, Antoni Rovira i Virgili, writing for the bilingual weekly newspaper *La Campana de Gràcia* (25 November 1922f, 2), under the pseudonym of *Fulmen*, picked up the story as part of an article on developments within the Catholic Church that showed an intolerance of the Catalan language. The article (*La Campana de Gràcia*, 1922, 2) also highlights two other bishops who are seen as part of these attempts at "dominació castellana:" Pere Rocamora i Garcia, the bishop of Tortosa, who forbade the use of Catalan amongst canons, and Francesc Muñoz i Izquierdo, bishop of Vic, who is defined by the author as "castellà castellanista" (a Castilian with a Castilian agenda) and who forbade the recitation of prayers in Catalan.

What other publications write about the *Pomells*, particularly those that belong to other ideologies, adds further depth to our understanding of the organisation's impact on Catalan society. One such example is *La Esquella de la Torratxa*, a satirical publication with a clear anti-clerical stance, which was largely dismissive of the *Pomells* and found them to be easy targets for jokes. In a fictional story (No. 2263, 472), from the 21 July 1922, one character observes a group of young boys passing by "amb marcat aire de ximple" (with a marked air of foolishness), and remarks that they must be the *Pomells*. In a later issue of *La Esquella de la Torratxa* (No. 2269, 564), from September (1922b) of that same year, the humour takes a dark turn as the *Pomells* are sexualised through a fictional story in which the boys are dressed "amb trajos de bany" (in bathrobes), which excites the Catalan avant-

garde poet, Josep Maria Junoy as he exclaims: “Quines pubertats!.” The swipe was undoubtedly aimed at Junoy, given his Catholic leanings, but the *Pomells* would be the vehicle for serving the humour. These early attacks against the organisation suggest that it was becoming more widely known within Catalan society, so much so that it was a target for the anti-clerical press, which sought to make members out as innocent, gormless, and subject to sexual grooming. However, much of the vitriol was aimed directly at Folch i Torres, namely because of his religious convictions. Jofre Albert Prats, a student representative of the Catalan left, launched a particularly scathing attack in *El Diluvio* (23 February Albert Prats 1923, 27), a Spanish-language Republican newspaper with an anti-clerical stance, in which the *Pomells* are labelled as a danger to Catalan youth because of their focus on virtue. What is interesting is that the article describes Folch i Torres and his project as immoral precisely because of this focus on piety.

Perish the bloom and bury the seeds: the downfall of the *Pomells*

In late 1923, after a few short years of rapid expansion, the *Pomells* would suddenly and unexpectedly meet their end as political instability in the Spanish State created the conditions for a dictatorship under General Primo de Rivera.⁷ On the 13th of September of that year, Miguel Primo de Rivera, an Andalusian aristocrat and military officer, used the Spanish army to lead a coup d'état and then established himself as a dictator. Primo de Rivera was, in the view of Romero Salvadó (1999, 48), stepping into “a vacuum that had existed largely as a consequence of the impact of the First World War.” Although Catholicism would be a central tenet of Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, the regime was swift to react against those outbursts and offshoots that blended Catholicism with Catalanism. On the 21st of September, 1923, barely eight days on from the establishment of Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, the *Pomells* were outlawed, through the *Butlletí Oficial* and with the approval of General Losada, for their “separatist” ways. In the *Boletín Oficial de la Provincia de Barcelona*, issued on the 22 of September, 1923, under Order 2697 (228), the new dictatorship, with Carlos de Lossada serving as governor of Barcelona, made clear its reasoning for banning the *Pomells*:

Resultando que la asociación *Asociació Pomells de Joventut*, según el artículo 1.º de sus estatutos, tiene por objeto fomentar la formación de pequeños grupos (*Pomells de Joventut*) de jóvenes, niños y niñas, en las escuelas, entidades culturales, orfeones, oficinas, etc., que convengan entre sí realizar semanalmente una obra piadosa y otra cívica cultural, con el fin de elevar el sentido moral de las juventudes de Cataluña con la práctica de las virtudes cristianas y cívicas, ha sido desviada por espíritu de sectarismo a inculcar en el ánimo de la juventud, no sólo el amor a Cataluña, sino también la idea de separación de España y de desprecio a la misma, irrogando con ello perjuicios incalculables a la región, que forma parte integrante de España; he acordado, en uso de las facultades que me confiere el Real decreto de suspensión de garantías, clausurar y suspender el funcionamiento de la expresada Asociación, que se extenderá por consiguiente a todos los grupos que tenga establecidos en esta provincia.

Given that the association *Asociació Pomells de Joventut*, according to article 1 of its statutes, aims to promote the formation of small groups (*Pomells de Joventut*) of young people, boys and girls, in schools, cultural entities, choirs, offices, etc., and that they agree to carry out a devout act and a cultural civic act every week, in order to lift the moral sense of the youth of Catalonia through the practice of Christian and civic virtues, has been infused with the spirit

of sectarianism to contaminate the minds of youth not only with a love for Catalonia, but also the idea of separation from Spain and contempt for Spain, thereby causing incalculable damage to the region, which is an integral part of Spain; I have decided, using the powers conferred on me by the Royal Decree on the suspension of guarantees, to shut down and suspend the operation of the aforementioned Association, which will therefore be extended to all the groups that it has established in this province.

The *Pomells*, when compared to other contemporaneous youth movements in Ireland (e.g. the *Fianna*) or Hungary (e.g. the *Leventeservezetek*), were not a militaristic operation, as they neither provided training for warfare nor did they have any set militaristic goals should war arise. In spite of this peaceful reality, the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera acted swiftly to ban the organisation and set in motion different punitive measure to prevent resistance and resurgence. This is particularly striking when we consider the importance of Catholicism to the dictator, and yet the *Pomells*, for all their devout deeds, were seen as a direct threat to a fragile Spain. Even at the very start of the dictatorship, this special relationship with the Church would become public spectacle as seen through Primo de Rivera and King Alfonso XIII's visit to Rome, in November, 1923, to show their obedience to His Holiness, the Pope.⁸ The Pope's previous blessing of the *Pomells* no longer mattered – they were easy sacrifices. The *Pomells* were not the only youth group to be dissolved in the purge. A similar fate awaited the *Centres Catòlics de Joventut*. Even those Catalan Catholic groups and associations aimed at adults and the wider family, such as the *Foment de Pietat Catalana*, the *Congregacions Marianes*, the *Lliga Espiritual de la Mare de Déu de Montserrat*, and the *Lliga del Bon Mot* were not spared. In addition, despite de Rivera's Spanish nationalism, and favouring of the Castilian language, Catalan-language publications did not disappear overnight. However, it is clear that many publications now had to tread the tightrope. Magazines, such as *Joventut*, a weekly publication for Catholic youth in Sabadell, continued to be published, perhaps because of its careful focus on Church matters and avoidance of anything political. Payne (1984, 146), whilst recognising discontent amongst Catalan bishops over the imposition of Spanish upon Primo de Rivera's rise to power, notes that dictatorship "developed harmonious relationships" with the Catholic Church.

The versatility and political pragmatism of Catalonia's elite stifled any protest at the prohibition of the *Pomells* and other organisations. To some degree, this behaviour was in keeping with the historic behaviour of the Catalan industrial elite. As De Riquer i Permanyer (1985, 31) notes, this social group were accused of having silently supported corrupt political parties during the Restoration period of the late 1800s by tolerating and enabling wrongful electoral practices. Prior to the coup, the industrial elite of Catalonia, alongside key individuals like Cadafalch, were on good terms with Primo de Rivera (Smith 2010, 166). However, whilst Catalonia's elite had certainly lent their support and enabled a coup d'état, they were not the only backers. Even workers' organizations, such as *Foment del Treball Nacional*, gave the dictator their "unqualified support" (Harrison 1990, 69). In the end, however, the beast that the Catalan elite had fed and tolerated would later turn on them by abolishing the *Mancomunitat* in 1924. Fusi Aizpúrua observes that when "democracy became identified with regional autonomy, Spanish nationalism condemned democracy" (Fusi Aizpúrua 1990, 44). This is largely true, but in the case of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, we must acknowledge the compliancy of the Catalan elite in backing a dictator. The *Pomells* were, in the eyes of the industrial Catalan elite, a small sacrifice to

pay in order to ensure the survival of their social power and class, and to see the containment of more radical political energies such as anarchists, communists, and liberals. However, it is worth asking if this sacrifice was really needed after all. As observed by Zoffmann Rodríguez and Marinello Bonnefoy (2021, 270), the mood of Catalan workers in the 1920s often swung “from conservatism to militancy – and back,” leading to demoralisation. Furthermore, General Severiano Martínez Anido, who was in charge of Barcelona in the lead up to Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, had already guaranteed the Catalan elites some protection by outlawing the CNT, as well as by arresting and deporting trade unionists.

The hood, which had become a key part of the Pomells’ wardrobe, would now become a joke in itself. On the 28th of September, 1923, *La Esquella de la Torratxa* 1922 (No. 2325, 643–644) published an issue with several items that gloat openly about the sudden dissolution of the Pomells, seeking to sneak in some final, cruel jokes at their expense. In one cartoon (*La Esquella de la Torratxa*, September 1923, 643), a little girl asks her mother what she should do now with her *Pomells* hood, to which her mother replies, “Desar-la, i passar el temps cosint, que us convé més” (Pack it away, and spend your time sewing, which will suit you all far better). On the following page (*La Esquella de la Torratxa*, September 1923, 644), Folch i Torres is openly mocked in a note that states had has been “ben encaputxat” (well hooded, i.e. put an end to).

Scentless and dead? The afterlives of the *Pomells*⁹

Catalonia would be the stage for a number of youth organisation throughout the twentieth century, but it is the afterlives of the doomed *Pomells* and the ripples they cast across Catalan society that should capture our attention. Primo de Rivera may have outlawed the *Pomells*, suppressed their magazine *Àmfora*, and attempted to impose Castilian, but the movement did not die off immediately. The white hood, which had been a distinctive marker of identity for the *Pomells*, would now become an easy target for the dictatorship. Massot i Muntaner (2003, 27) notes that, in February, 1924, the Capuchins were handed a hefty fee for having allowed a group of girls, who wore the distinctive hood of the *Pomells*, to enter the *Santuari de la Mare de Déu de l’Ajuda* (Sanctuary of Our Lady of Perpetual Help) in Barcelona.

Despite this dark and gloomy backdrop of open persecution during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, the fruits of the *Pomells* would become apparent in the 1930s, showing that the organisation had served as an engine of sorts for future groups and individuals within the Catalan sphere. For example, in 1931, the Catalan priest Albert Bonet i Marrugat (1894–1974) created the *Federació de Joves Cristians de Catalunya* (1931–1936, hereinafter referred to as the *Federació*), which could be considered a successor of sorts to the *Pomells*. Bonet certainly had experience of working with young Catalans, as Codinachs i Verdager (1990, 80) notes, because he had in fact been directly involved with the *Pomells*. Just as the *Pomells* had relied on *Àmfora* to create community and express ideas, the *Federació* would turn to an existing publication, *El Matí* (1929–1936), to spread its message, and create its own weekly publication, *Flama* (1931–1936), with two supplements, *Esclat* (aimed at school children) and *Aules* (targeted at university students). The breakout of the Spanish Civil War in July, 1936, spelt the end for the *Federació*, as some left Catalonia to join Franco’s fascist forces, whilst others stayed to protect Catalonia, but

Bonet scurried off to Italy in search of safety. Much like the *Pomells*, the *Federació* commanded large numbers of youths, with around 18,000 members in 1936 (Massot i Muntaner 1973, 102), but what sets the *Federació* apart was its militaristic division of its members into specific bands.

Even with changing times, members of the *Pomells* zealously guarded their cherished memories of the organisation. One member in Begur, Concepció Pi (often called “la Tató”) kept a *Pomells* flag under lock and key throughout the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, the Second Republic, the Franco dictatorship, and through the regime change of 1975 (*Els Pomells de Joventut: Begur*, Ajuntament de Begur, 2002, 2). The flag meant so much to her that it was draped over her coffin when she was buried on the 8th of September, 1997 (Ajuntament de Begur, 6). If anything, the *Pomells* were a cherished childhood memory that Concepció wanted to take with her as she departed this world, and, by incorporating the flag into her funerary ritual, she wanted to be openly associated with the organisation.

Seeds of change: what does the history of the *Pomells* tell us?

In the face of open hostility, the *Pomells* placed a high premium on instilling Catholic values and virtue, as well as maintaining, normalising, and promoting the Catalan language within Catalonia and further afield. For these endeavours, the *Pomells* were mostly well received by different individuals and institutions, but their activities also reveal divisions within Catalonia’s social fabric, particularly within the Catholic Church. Despite being a relatively harmless organisation for young Catholic Catalans, the *Pomells*, because of their agency, were destined to become casualties of history and an expendable pawn given in exchange for the survival and maintenance of Catalonia’s industrial elite. As well as revealing divisions amongst the high and mighty, the history of the *Pomells* invites us to re-think religiosity across Catalonia in the early twentieth century. The Catholic Revival of the late nineteenth century was certainly taken up and supported by the bourgeoisie, which is demonstrated in their fervent support and clear involvement in the *Pomells*, but the fact that a faith-based, national organisation could penetrate multiple geographies within and beyond Catalonia suggests that we may need to rethink the class dynamics of the aforementioned Revival. Furthermore, the global realities of the Catalan language in the nineteenth and twentieth century, as evidenced through the presence of *Pomells* groups beyond the Catalan-speaking world, requires greater attention as we seek to establish social networks and determine how Catalan was being kept alive, as a community language, amongst a far-flung diaspora. Although the *Pomells* were the first victims of Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, Catalonia’s cultural renaissance and the Catalan language would continue to flower. Against the current backdrop of a looming language emergency, groups such as the *Pomells* invite us to think about the important role played by young people, across a variety of socio-economic and political backgrounds, in preserving and carrying languages and cultures forward into the future.

Notes

1. The *Lliga Espiritual*, as well as being a Catholic organisation, had a strong Catalanist association, with members from various sectors across Catalan society, including Enric Prat de la Riba i Sarrà (politician), Antoni Gaudí i Cornet (architect), Joan Alzina i Melis (psychiatrist), and Josep Llimona i Bruguera (sculptor).
2. Tapis de Guarro was a champion of the Catalan language and participated in the “First International Conference on the Catalan Language,” held in Barcelona in October, 1906. Camarasa i Serra was J. M. Folch i Torres’ wife, and by the time of the *Pomells*, the couple had lost two of their sons in infancy (one in 1915, the other in 1919 – both named after their father). They would later lose a daughter in 1928, and another son at the Battle of the Ebro in 1938.
3. Managed and edited by Folch i Torres, *Àmfora: Butlletí dels Pomells de Joventut de Catalunya* would be the *Pomells*’ main publication from 1920 to 1923.
4. The interest in targeting Francesc Fàbrega i Amat could well have been triggered by the decision of another clergy member, Joan M. Viñas, in that same year, to ban the creation of any branches of the *Pomells* within his *Escola Pia* schools in Catalonia.
5. The *Jocs Florals*, or “Floral Games,” were a series of medieval artistic competitions, celebrating poetry mainly, in the Occitan and Catalan literary traditions. They were revived in 1859, as part of the *Renaixença*, Catalonia’s cultural renaissance.
6. The *Lliga Regionalista* (1901–1936, “Regionalist League of Catalonia”) was a conservative Catalan political party that dominated Catalan politics from 1901 to 1923. The party managed to bring about the creation of the *Mancomunitat de Catalunya* (“Commonwealth of Catalonia”) in 1914.
7. As noted by Romero Salvadó (2008, 94), Barcelona became a troublesome tinderbox as it was an industrial powerhouse that mixed together a bourgeoisie and a working class that were “alienated from the distant centre of state power.”
8. However, despite these initial signs of acceptance, scholars (Adagio 2004; Quiroga 2022) have also emphasised that the dictator’s later relationship with the Church would turn stale, particularly following the introduction of the *texto único*, in 1927, which would be imposed on all primary and secondary schools. The Catholic response to this change was, as noted by Boyd (1997, 176), “mixed” given that the text stifled conflict between educators and granted students in religious schools a greater chance of success in exams.
9. Whilst the afterlives of the *Pomells* are very apparent within contemporary Catalonia, as I have alluded to earlier in this article, it is my suspicion that Latin America, particularly the cases of Argentina and Brazil, could well offer a postlude of sorts to the history of the *Pomells*, enabling remaining groups to continue on beyond the reach of a Spanish dictatorship, but this hypothesis requires further investigation and analysis.

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