



Not only a muse: María Luisa Elío's creative network during her exile in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have mainly studied the work of María Luisa Elío (Pamplona, 1926 – Mexico City, 2009) by examining the influence exile had on her writing. But her fruitful cultural life outside of her own writing has been overshadowed. In order to fill this research gap, the present article focuses on the impact that Elío has had on various forms of cultural production, including novels, short stories, poetry and a film. It gauges her sociocultural resonance through an analysis of her private relational sphere and the public influence she had on the cultural production of those surrounding her, for she was not only a muse but a crucial member of a transnational community.

This article first discusses network theory. Second, it presents Elío's work as a case study to reevaluate the experiences of exile through an interconnected analytical framework. It examines the ways in which her contributions and creative influence transcend the exile community and reach a wider creative network of friends that included Eliseo Diego, Salvador Elizondo, Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez, among others. Finally, this study shows how Elío has been kept alive over the years in different cultural forms and evaluates her cultural legacy and artistic relevance within her sociocultural milieu.

KEYWORDS

María Luisa Elío; creative network; exiled women's writing; Mexican cultural sphere; Spanish Republican exile

Introduction

María Luisa Elío (Pamplona, 1926 – Mexico City, 2009) could be remembered as a woman who evoked the memory of her lost childhood in a variety of art forms. Based on her life story, she devised the plot and wrote the script of the award-winning cult film *En el balcón vacío* (1962) – a tribute to the Spaniards who went into exile as a result of the Francoist uprising against the Republic in 1936. She even acted as one of the main characters and recorded the voice-over narration. She also bore testimony to the experience of exile in her personal narrative production, which includes the memoir *Tiempo de llorar* (1988) and the short-story collection *Cuaderno de apuntes* (1995). Critics have discussed Elío's narrative production at length, although her literary work has not yet been published in its entirety.¹ This article aims to shed light on another aspect of her life, considering her sociocultural agency within a friendly, creative network of writers and artists. During different periods in her life, Elío maintained a close relationship with Alejo

Carpentier, Eliseo Diego, Salvador Elizondo, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Álvaro Mutis and Octavio Paz, among others (Mateo Gambarte 2015, 43). Although she established some of those connections during a brief but productive stay in Havana, Cuba, most of her cultural alliances were formed in Mexico City – a melting pot of displaced individuals who contributed to the transformation of postrevolutionary Mexico.²

Despite the fact that her narrative reflected her experience as a woman in exile and the trauma of a life “in-between”, she is little known or recognized for the positive influence she wielded in Mexican cultural life, especially within her creative network of friends. Elío’s case is representative of a broader paradigm within exile studies. As Alicia Alted Vigil (1997) and Josebe Martínez (2007) have pointed out, there is an overwhelming tendency in exile studies to analyze the canon of male writers, specifically their social, cultural and political significance. Consequently, there is a lack of attention to women writers and to the interconnections between the private and the public spheres. According to Pilar Domínguez Prats,

[c]onviene resaltar la interdependencia entre ambas esferas de la vida social y fijar la atención en la esfera privada desde lo público. Como veremos en el caso del exilio, la actividad política de las republicanas españolas transitaba con facilidad desde el ámbito público al privado. (2009, 75)

Based on interviews and other available documents, which include Elío’s personal correspondence, housed in her family archive, this article aims to situate Elío as a member of a wider social network by foregrounding her sociocultural resonance.

Shedding light on Elío’s relevance in the public sphere allows for a reconsideration of her persona. While she positively influenced the creative output of her friends, they also spurred her to develop her own creative work. This plural, multidirectional collaboration constitutes what Andrea Gaggioli, Giuseppe Riva, Luca Milani and Elvis Mazzoni consider a “creative network”, which they define as a “socio-technical system which self-organizes to generate new knowledge through the interactions between the individuals” (2013, 4). In the following pages, I will make the case for a public, collaborative profile of Elío that calls attention to her creative impulse and agency within her sociocultural milieu in Mexico and Cuba during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. I will evaluate her past and present relevance and show that although her contributions are mainly traceable during these three decades, her cultural legacy is still present in contemporary cultural production.

Exile networks

Although the term *network* has become a buzzword in digital approaches to represent a connected cluster of people or ideas, it can also be applied to a pre-internet world to emphasize the analog, flexible structure of those connections. We can see a network as a multiaxial source of meaning that can be applied to different domains. Duncan J. Watts famously described a network as “nothing more than a collection of objects connected to each other in some fashion” (2003, 28). But *network* has also come to mean an inclusive, multilateral logic where the “center” of a networked system is collective and many people contribute to it.³ A variety of academic fields – ranging from biology to economics, from anthropology to psychology and from computer science to mathematics – have used this relational model for their research. Exile studies also takes into

consideration refugee support networks and how they may help those who have been displaced thrive outside of their country of origin.

Applying a network lens to exile studies confirms that the literary and historical spheres are intertwined with the cultural, social and political spheres, a perspective that some scholars of Spanish exile studies have acknowledged. Mari Paz Balibrea, for example, has made the case for a cultural turn that provides “una perspectiva diaspórica que enfatiza la relación del exilio con la tierra de llegada [y] la relación de los productos literarios con procesos sociopolíticos transnacionales” (2010, 257). Such a methodological shift would not only allow exile scholars to reconsider some traditional approaches, which have prioritized the aesthetic and formal qualities of literary works, but it would also be in tune with other perspectives that emphasize the impact of sociocultural agents. In other words, a commitment to tracing exilic networks enhances a dialogue between fields that may not have been previously related, and the results of this research can substantially enrich those areas of study. As Emmanuelle Barozet suggests, “la teoría de redes ... permite explicar fenómenos que la sola dimensión individual no rescata en toda su complejidad” (2002, 18). Indeed, network theory postulates that people belong to multiple, ever-changing nodes – that is, to the branch point where different pathways intersect – rather than to immutable categories.⁴ An interconnected, dynamic representation of women in exile echoes Marina Camboni’s reflection that “[b]y making ‘networking’ the central metaphor of our research ... we are able to better represent the actual historical conditions and roles played by many of the women whose contribution to culture we wanted to investigate, [and] describe material and immaterial relations [of cultural agents]” (2004, 9).

As a matter of fact, applying a relational lens is critically important given that exiled women have historically suffered a double marginalization based on their displacement and their gender. This lens offers a panoramic view of the complex subjectivities that intersect with absences and silences. Therefore, the study of exiled writers’ sociocultural nodes and public participation in their host countries creates a wider framework to address how exiled women writers were able to develop their own creative identities and how their contributions helped to shape their transnational communities.

In cases of exile, support systems often arise during and after displacement. Two examples in the case of Spanish exiles are the Servicio de Evacuación de Refugiados Españoles (SERE) and the Junta de Auxilio a los Republicanos Españoles (JARE), created by Juan Negrín and Indalecio Prieto respectively. Upon their arrival to Mexico, Spanish refugees made use of these institutional platforms, which helped to alleviate the hardships of having to start anew by funding intellectual, commercial and farming activities. Although the organizations in themselves were not networks as defined here, given that they reproduced a strong centralist institutional hierarchy and selected which individuals would benefit, it is worth highlighting that their material and immaterial help promoted the creation of Spanish refugee nodes – based on political, cultural and regional proximity – that later could structure their own support networks. On the one hand, these nodes mirrored the solidarity networks that previous Spanish immigrants, called *gachupines*, had built at the end of the nineteenth century. On the other, there was some fragmentation in these newer networks due to differing views on the legitimacy of Franco’s power. Other expressions of solidarity can be found in the noninstitutional affinity groups that exiles with similar beliefs or literary interests formed in their host countries (Pérez Guerrero

2008, 108). Their relationships served to (re)construct their identity and to produce a sense of belonging (Sierra 2006, 173). There are also other examples of networks in exile. International solidarity and antifascism linked younger exiles. They founded a transnational movement, inspired by the Cuban Revolution, with the aim of bringing down the Franco dictatorship, called *Movimiento Español 1959 (ME/59)*, in which most of Elío's peers participated (Aub 1992), although she stayed out of this circle. Later still, as Teresa Ferriz Roure's work (2004, 2017) has demonstrated, a polyphonic archive of testimonies is also located in digital nodes devoted to memory. Although generalizations can be reductive, displaced people tend to create networks as a means of reconfiguring their torn identities, which respond to different relational matrices based on regional ties, friendship, political ideology or cultural interests.

Ultimately, the study of people's interactions, influences, contributions and public resonance constitutes a key element in exile studies. This approach explores those "contactos fecundos" (Abellán 1976, 20) between exiles and their host country, as Eduardo Mateo Gambarte (2015) has done for the so-called Second Generation.⁵ Establishing their relationality helps to address a problematic dichotomy that, as Balibrea (2003) has noted, may be present in the field: the bidirectional relation between those who remain *inside* and those who leave for the *outside*. Do exiled writers and artists need to reflect on Franco's Spain to be considered part of Spanish culture? Are those who rejected their ties to the nation that exiled them still part of that nation? For instance, Luis Elío Torres, Elío's father, cut all ties with Spain after his exile, and his daughter refused to return to her place of birth while he was still alive. As this makes evident, for political or biographical reasons, not all of those in exile maintained their ties with Francoist Spain. Such bonds were even more fragile for those who left the country as children and who were mostly raised in their host countries (France, England, Russia, Mexico, etc.), with various cultures and languages. In short, studying exile only in relation to Spain neglects the sociocultural fabric that exiles formed far from the nation that drove them out. In view of everything outlined above, tracing exilic networks assembles a mosaic of heterogeneous experiences and narratives that bring together social, cultural and political discourses and practices that transcended Spain's cultural environment, while exiled individuals and groups were adapting to new, multifaceted relational models.

Connections

Like many offspring of *la España peregrina*, Elío's cultural network crystallized largely – but not exclusively – among a community of exiled Spanish writers and artists who had been hit by the Spanish Civil War and subsequently the Second World War. Elío was educated at the Academia Hispano-Mexicana (Pérez 1999, 740), subsidized by the JARE. She stepped into acting, her first artistic commitment, when she was eighteen. That inaugural experience began alongside another woman in exile, Magda Donato, Margarita Nelken's sister, at the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes. Eventually, Elío joined the theater group created by Seki Sano as well as the innovative experimental theater group *Poesía en Voz Alta*, whose fresh approach led to the birth of Mexican experimental theater (Baptista 2015, 283). During that time, she worked closely with Juan José Arreola, Leonora Carrington, Carlos Fuentes, Juan García Ponce, Elena Garro, Luis Felipe Vivanco, Octavio Paz, Alfonso Reyes and Juan Soriano.

Aside from prominent Mexican figures, Elío socialized with older Spanish exiles, like José Bergamín, Luis Buñuel, José Gaos and especially Emilio Prados, who was a pivotal figure for her. As Francisco Chica (1994) and Mateo Gambarte (2009) have indicated, she also established connections with younger, contemporaneous Spanish exiles, such as Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, José de la Colina, Vicente Gandía, Jomí García Ascot, Emilio García Riera, Tomás Segovia and Ramón Xirau. The names of these younger exiles are typically associated with what has come to be known as the Grupo Nepantla or Second Generation, but she was not part of this group of writers during their formative years. Elío started writing at the age of thirty-three. During her twenties, in the mid-1940s and 1950s, her devotion to acting and her involvement in theater and cinema projects (she had had roles in three Mexican movies and three plays by then) kept her from working with *Presencia* and *Clavileño*, two of the main literary outlets for young exile writers. And yet her name resonated in periodicals at the time. In *Diorama de la Cultura, México en la Cultura* and *Revista de la Universidad*, she appears in relation to the events of various social and cultural groups like the Jockey Club and the aforementioned Poesía en Voz Alta. If in 1957 she saw her role as an actress as “la mejor de las formas de vida” (Elío 1957, 1), because she represented the lives of others – or even her own – on the screen or the stage, years later she began to see herself as a character in a variety of artistic works. Elío’s creative network and life therefore moved between different nodes in the performing arts, literary circles and film enclaves.

Her life also intersected with fiction when she was portrayed in literary works. She features as a main character in two short stories by Salvador Elizondo, “La puerta” (Elizondo 2000) and “Allá...” (Elizondo 2012). In them, Elizondo incorporates distinctive elements from Elío’s own narrative “En el balcón vacío” (1995, 29–35): a small button that falls to the ground, allusions to childhood and a blend of deictic markers *aquí* and *allá*, among others. In Carlos Fuentes’s *Los años con Laura Díaz*, Elío stands out as the protagonist’s “exiliada preferida” (1999, 524). She is depicted as “la más interesante presencia femenina en el Jockey Club de los años cuarenta”, along with “un grupo bullicioso, alegre, discutiador y entrañable de jóvenes exiliados que se adaptaron a México pero nunca abandonaron a España, ceceando siempre ... discutiendo siempre ... se llamaban Oteyza, Serra Puig, Muñoz de Baena, García Ascot, Xirau, Durán, Segovia y Blanco Aguinaga” (523–524).

Elío’s cultural footprint can also be seen in contemporary works. Her life was the inspiration behind of the main characters in Ana García Bergua’s novel *La bomba de San José* (2012). She also appears as the protagonist and narrator of *María Luisa Elío Bernal: La vida como nostalgia* (2009), an unusual biography written by Mateo Gambarte emulating the childhood voice of Elío in the first person. More recently, Eliseo Alberto has included Elío in *La novela de mi padre* (2017), a narration about the loss of his father, Cuban poet Eliseo Diego. There, Alberto writes: “Murió Eliseo [Diego], y el departamento de la calle Amores se fue llenando de amor, se repletó de amigos: María Luisa Elío, Carlos Pellicer López, Andrés Gómez...” (39). The list cites the names of fourteen friends of the poet, but it is significant that the first place is reserved for Elío. Her cultural influence clearly continues to extend into the twenty-first century.

Aside from these literary cameos, Elío came to be known for her strong magnetic personality. Elena Poniatowska highlighted this aspect in an interview conducted in 1957:

Hay mujeres de fuego en el mundo y María Luisa Elío es una de ellas. ... Echa chispas por las narices, sus cabellos están llenos de reflejos de fuego, sus ojos tienen pequeñas llamas doradas, y sus manos dan toques eléctricos. Una mujer incendiada, que prende pequeños fuegos en los rincones de la vida ... como una espada reluciente. (Elío 1957, 1)

Poniatowska's image of Elío as a woman who was called to actively stimulate creativity has endured in a younger generation of writers. Mónica Lavín's memories of Elío are a case in point. In a recent email exchange, Lavín referred to "esos ojos verdes y sobre todo la originalidad de sus comentarios" (2020, 1). Previously, in a newspaper article from 2019, Lavín recalled, "Fue María Luisa Elío, excepcional e inteligente (autora de *Tiempo de llorar*), quien me dijo algo entusiasta por un breve texto mío de adolescente" (1), emphasizing Elío's active support of art and creativity. In light of the above, her cultural resonance, which has influenced the work of many writers, is essential to understanding her creative work as a whole.

Not only a muse

Perhaps it was that magnetism that inadvertently overshadowed her true agency. Be it in the case of the film *En el balcón vacío* or the novel *Cien años de soledad*, Elío has often been considered a muse, i.e., a divine source of inspiration. Because a muse is an archetypal figure that bridges the spiritual world and the material world, it is understood that "the one who received the blessings of the Muses could attain levels of creativity otherwise inaccessible to men" (Penier 2015, 1). Elío's ex-husband, exiled film director and poet Jomí García Ascot, referred to her as "mi musa" in their personal correspondence, and, in a suggestive drawing, Elío appears floating on the film set, behind García Ascot, as if she were whispering creative inspiration into his ear (Figure 1). This portrayal of Elío corresponds with the mythological image the ancient Greeks had of the Muses: "an idealized woman – blessed with beauty and creativity [that produces] some sort of alchemy in those people she becomes attached to, which, in turn, enables them to fulfill their true potential" (Penier 2015, 1). The role fulfilled by Elío in this artistic image – produced and understood in its sentimental, private context, which is not under scrutiny here – coincides with a role that has been assigned to her in the public sphere. In this section, I suggest that Elío was not only a muse, but a caring, active member of a creative network.

If traditionally a muse is a "beloved woman [who serves as] the chief source of inspiration for a poet", examples of which can be found in Dante's Beatrice or Petrarch's Laura, the idea also contains an erotic component, given that muses are supposed to "sublimate potent desires into creative acts" (Penier 2015, 1–2). In a 2018 newspaper piece, Elío is portrayed as a synthesis of an inspiring muse and the goddess Aphrodite. The author writes: "María Luisa Elío, musa de *El balcón vacío* ... 'paraba el tráfico', como decía Jaime Muñoz de Baena, con su esplendor juvenil" (Casillas de Alba 2018). Such a portrayal is problematic because it promotes a sexist image in which an erotically charged Elío is given the role of inspiring ideas in others. In fact, the idea of a muse tends to present women as passive, ethereal beings who are alienated from the active, prolific activity of men. Ten years earlier, at the time of her death, the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* reinforced her image as a passive woman who stimulated ideas in men with an obituary preceded by the headline: "Musa de Gabriel García Márquez" (Valle 2009). The piece went as far as to state that when Elío married García Ascot, "Él la paseó [sic] por los ambientes del cine, y la llevó a Cuba". This patriarchal

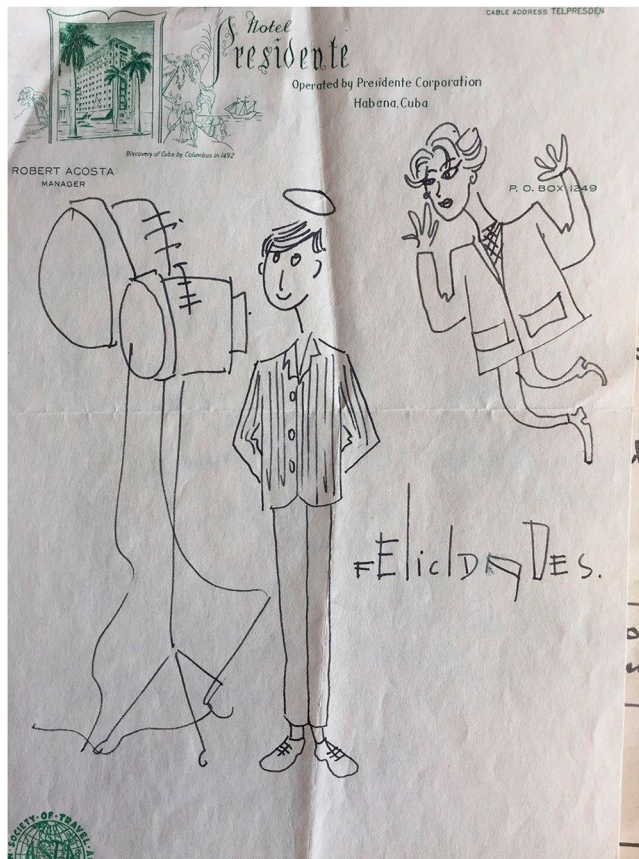


Figure 1. Elío depicted as a muse in a birthday letter sent by her husband Jomí García Ascot while in Havana, Cuba. ©Diego García Elío.

vision of a man guiding a woman through new places perpetuates the image of a docile woman; but it is also incorrect, as Elío had been working on film sets for at least a decade before García Ascot began his first film project. I contend that far from being exclusively a muse, Elío was an artistic creator in her own right. My aim is to reconsider the figure of Elío by focusing on the creative connections in which she was valued as an active member.

If we look at the testimonies of acquaintances and friends, Elío is remembered as a short-tempered woman who called into question established approaches and spurred new forms of creativity. Emilio García Riera, screenwriter and film historian, who worked closely with her and García Ascot on the film *En el balcón vacío*, states:

María Luisa era implacable. A veces, Jomí y yo nos quedábamos satisfechos con la solución de una escena, pero ella nos clavaba su dura y clara mirada y nos decía: “¿Estáis contentos, eh?, qué bien, qué mono, ¡pero si parece ‘La del soto del parral’!, ¿Sabéis qué os digo? ¡Que os podéis ir al demonio!” y de inmediato, después de sonrojar[nos], nos obligaba María Luisa, con eficacia, a encontrar una solución mejor. (As quoted in Mateo Gambarte 2009, 83)

Exiled writer and film critic José de la Colina echoes a similar view.⁶ He also points out Elío’s connection to a wider cultural community: “Creo que [María Luisa] tiene ese

papel que tienen ciertas personas en distintas generaciones de incitadora y de revoltosa, que inspira cosas a la gente. Un personaje que en parte es autora de la obra de otros” (as quoted in Mateo Gambarte 2009, 58). Mateo Gambarte himself, who has extensively written about Elío’s work and life, refers to her as a “dinamizadora cultural” (2012, 323), whose influence on the Mexican cultural sphere was akin to that of Pepín Bello on the Generation of ’27 and mentions her connections with the “intelectualidad” (323) in Mexico City and Havana, from Álvaro Mutis and Eliseo Diego to Gabriel García Márquez, who was an important node in this network.⁷

Elío’s collaboration with Gabriel García Márquez (see Figure 2) is an example of the collaborative support she maintained within her creative network. She became one of his few literary confidants. She read some chapter drafts of his masterpiece *Cien años de soledad* (García Márquez 2007) and provided feedback based on her viewpoint as an educated female reader (Santana Acuña 2020, 132). In different interviews, both writers have evoked with endearment the first time they met at a dinner with Carlos Fuentes, García Ascot, Álvaro Mutis and Octavio Paz. It was Mutis who introduced the young Colombian writer to the Elío–García Ascot couple shortly after his arrival in Mexico City in 1961. Their connection turned out to be of such value that García Márquez ended up dedicating the novel that would secure him international acclaim to Elío and García Ascot. Many years later, the Nobel Prize winner was to recall that distant day when he arrived in Mexico City: “Llegué a México con veinte dólares y salí de aquí con *Cien años de soledad*” (García Márquez 2017, 67). His remarks about the writing process serve as a clear example of the collaborative work that took place within a transnational creative network of which Elío was part: “En la noche venían a vernos Álvaro Mutis y su mujer, María Luisa Elío y Jomí García Ascot, que vivían muy cerca; traían whisky, pollo y papas, y bebíamos y hablábamos del libro” (García Márquez 2017, 68).⁸ As Gaggioli, Riva, Milani and Mazzoni have pointed out, “creativity ... does not take place in the mind of



Figure 2. Elío at García Márquez’s home in Cuernavaca. “Gabriel García Márquez y María Luisa Elío”. ©Harry Ransom Center. The University of Texas at Austin.

a single person, but arises in the dynamic transactions among individuals and the environment in which they are situated" (2013, 4). In fact, García Márquez has reflected on the unconditional support he received from Mutis and Elío to continue writing:

Y hubo un momento en que pensé: "¡Caramba, a lo mejor todos estos gritos de Álvaro [Mutis] y estos entusiasmos de María Luis Elío me han hipnotizado y estoy trabajando en esto apasionadamente, sin darme cuenta que de pronto me he metido en una nube de fantasía acompañado por mis amigos, y esto no sirve para nada ni le va a interesar a nadie!". (García Márquez 2017, 69)

Their close collaboration continued during the fourteen months in which García Márquez secluded himself to write the groundbreaking book. Elío became an integral part of the writing process. She recalled:

[Gabo] me solía llamar [y] me decía: "Te voy a leer un trocito, a ver qué te parece". Y me leía un trocito. Me llamaba y me decía: "Te voy a explicar cómo van vestidas las tías. ¿Qué más les pondrías tú? ¿De qué color te parece que sea el traje?". Y hablábamos. O me decía: "Fíjate que esta palabra la he puesto aquí pero no sé qué quiere decir. ¿Tus tías lo decían? Porque mis tías sí". Y así. Era una maravilla. Nos la pasábamos hablando por teléfono. (As quoted in Paternostro 2014, 138–139)

Elío was not merely a passive muse that exuded beauty or creativity to a restless author, but a friend with whom to interact during the creative process ("me solía llamar ... y hablábamos"). Their conversations took new forms over the years. Her family archive reveals that their friendship continued after García Márquez became a literary star in 1967. In fact, when Elío returned to Spain after a thirty-four-year absence, she said she felt at home in "la Casa de los Gabos" in Barcelona.⁹ There, she met Mario Vargas Llosa and other writers (Elío 1970a). She described that cultural atmosphere to her sisters as "inmejorable, estoy en la crema del intelecto" (Elío 1970b). Elío was also among those invited to Stockholm to the Nobel Prize ceremony in 1982. In short, she was an active network member who interacted with and meaningfully contributed to García Márquez's narrative while he followed the suggestions of other friends as well. As he explained: "La obra [*Cien años de soledad*] me llevaba a tal velocidad que yo no me podía parar, y a partir de ese momento se creó una especie de equipo solidario alrededor del libro, y todos mis amigos me ayudaron" (2017, 70). This collaborative team included friends like García Ascot, García Ponce, Juan Vicente Melo, Carlos Monsiváis, Álvaro Mutis and José Emilio Pacheco. Even though other people contributed to García Márquez's creative process, it seems that Elío's and Mutis's constant support was vital from the beginning. When Poniatowska asked García Márquez about the level of cooperation and support that he received from these two close friends, she suggested the possibility of considering them coauthors of the novel:

- ¿Álvaro Mutis y María Luisa Elío también podrían ser coautores de *Cien años de soledad*?
- Sí, compraban mercados enteros, cocinábamos, bebíamos y yo les hablaba de lo que había escrito durante el día. Mercedes y yo no teníamos un centavo. (García Márquez 2017, 69)

The emphasis on Elío's creative influence on García Márquez does not diminish his authorship nor does it aim to attribute *Cien años de soledad* to others – especially when one considers the fragility of memories and the possibility of their presenting different versions of truth. Rather, it offers a general framework from which to understand how Elío's support

clearly contributed to and positively influenced a global masterpiece. Categorizing Elío as a mere muse, in a sense, disempowers her as a writer on that collaborative cultural horizon and deprives her of agency. Far from being a woman who passively irradiated ideas to a productive, creative man, she was an equal contributor. Additionally, failing to recognize her creative collaboration underestimates her own creative voice. It is hard to imagine a reference to Álvaro Mutis as “García Márquez’s muse”, despite there being a tradition of male muses (see, for example, Tayler 1990; Young 1973). As this section shows, Elío was more than a mere muse. She was a caring, friendly, active, productive member within her creative network.

As this network analysis suggests, the creative process is multidirectional and people who influence can also be influenced. While Elío’s contributions are relevant to many cultural actors with whom she worked in Mexico, she also relied on the support of other people while in Cuba. Until her arrival in Havana in 1959, Elío had devoted herself to acting in films and plays, with no previous formal interest in writing. However, her stay on the island brought back the war memories of her childhood. This trauma exploded in the form of a written narrative (Jato 2016). In several interviews she noted that she started writing because of the explosive atmosphere of the Cuban Revolution and “los amigos que me rodeaban (Eliseo Diego, Alejo Carpentier, etc.) [fueron] quienes me acercaron a la escritura” (Elío 2006, 162). She also recalled how Carpentier, who was the first person to read her narrative, congratulated her and told her: “siga escribiendo, pues el mundo interior que he descubierto aquí me hace ver que no la conocía a usted por completo” (Ulacia and Valender 2004, 373).

She found similar support in her husband, García Ascot, and in a circle of close friends like Eliseo Diego, Carlos Fuentes and Juan García Ponce, among others. In an unpublished private letter to García Ascot, Elío states:

Hoy se ha pasado toda la tarde conmigo Carlos [Fuentes], tan simpático como siempre. ... Le di a leer mi cuento igualmente ayer a Juan G[arcía] Ponce que estuvieron a verme. A los dos les ha gustado mucho. Juan me dijo que le parecía magnífico y que creía –como tú– que debo desarrollarlo más. Piensa que se podría sacar de ahí muy bien una novela y si no un cuento bastante más largo. Lo mismo cree Carlos [Fuentes]. De todas formas me he quedado bastante contenta pues lo tuyo podría ser amor de marido. (Elío 1959b)

It is worth noting that Fuentes, a regular visitor to her house during those years, was one of her most fervent supporters. Another unpublished letter shows how he encouraged her to write.¹⁰

Although tracing this multidirectional support already positions Elío as an active, relevant cultural agent within a creative network, an analysis of paratextual practices also reveals her influence. García Márquez’s dedication of his masterpiece to Elío and her husband emphasizes the public connection between the couple and the Colombian writer. His dedication reads: “para jomí garcía ascot y maría luisa elío [sic]” (García Márquez 2007, 7). The importance of this paratext can be understood through the words of Gérard Genette, who refers to the public dedicatee as “a person who is more or less well known but with whom the author, by his dedication, indicates a relationship that is public in nature – intellectual, artistic, political, or other” (1997, 131). During the 1960s, Elizondo also dedicated the aforementioned short story “Allá...” to Elío: “Para María Luisa Elío” (2012, 141). Furthermore, Elío’s name appears in the paratext that

opens Eliseo Diego's collection of poems *Cuatro de oros* (2001). Reciprocally, a poem of Diego's titled "Entre la dicha y la niebla" (198) opens Elío's compendium of short stories *Cuaderno de apuntes*. Finally, Elío appears as the dedicatee of two more poems: "Un tiempo antiguo", written by her ex-husband, García Ascot (1964, 65), and the visual poem "La caja negra" by the Mexican poet Gerardo Cíper (1978). This interaction of paratextuality, with Elío as a public dedicatee, emphasizes her creative agency within her cultural milieu.

If Elío's influence on the Mexican creative sphere was substantial, her own narrative work was no less impactful within the Spanish exile community. When Elena Aub – a member of the aforementioned anti-Francoist political movement ME/59 and daughter of exiled writer Max Aub – asked Ignacio (Nacho) Villarías, a political comrade, about his return to Spain after decades of exile in Mexico, he answered by evoking Elío: "¡Ah! Una alegría enorme... No sé... para esto me remito siempre a María Luisa Elío... ese sentir, sin exageración... eso fue lo mío" (as quoted in Aub 1992, 272). Villarías's answer refers to the experience described by Elío in her memoir *Tiempo de llorar*, whose opening lines read: "Y ahora me doy cuenta de que regresar es irse" (1988, 7), a trope that successfully represented an impossible return. Back in Mexico, she continued to thrive and leave a mark on her cultural sphere.

Conclusions

In this article I have explained the importance of using a network approach to Spanish exile studies as an analytical tool to bring to the surface fertile interactions, influences, contributions and public resonances. This involves examining not only the significance exiles have for Spain but also the social, cultural and political practices and discourses that thrived in their host communities. This article opens up the established and limiting perception of María Luisa Elío and highlights several Mexican creative works where her persona is part of the narrative itself, ranging from García Ascot's film *En el balcón vacío* to Elizondo's short stories "La puerta" and "Allá..." to Fuentes's novel *Los años con Laura Díaz*, among others. Beyond these literary cameos, Elío's influence was also publicly evident in various dedications, among them Eliseo Diego's poetry books and García Márquez's most renowned novel. Her cultural influence continues to extend into the twenty-first century in new cultural productions. More importantly, this article evinces the multi-directional support that existed between Elío and the members of her cultural circle. She did not only contribute to the work of different writers and poets, but also received similar support from those closest to her, such as Carpentier, Fuentes and García Ascot. This influence and support shows her cultural resonance during her exile in Mexico.

All this suggests that Elío was not only a muse, as has often been said of her contribution to *Cien años de soledad*. Identifying her merely as a muse impedes the recognition of her prolific collaboration and therefore underestimates her own creative voice, which extends from the cult film *En el balcón vacío* to a celebrated memoir and a series of short stories. In light of this framing, Elío's legacy transcends that of a muse. She was a woman in exile who gave space to her memories in different narratives and made an important creative contribution to her cultural milieu. By using network theory as an analytical framework, I have sought to begin to fill a research gap in the current scholarship on her work.

Notes

1. See Naharro-Calderón (1995), Jato (2009, 2016), Mateo Gambarte (2009, 2015) and Baptista (2015). I found unpublished micro-narratives in Elío's personal collection, as well as other materials, which are expected to be published soon.
2. It is worth noting that despite the initial hostility promoted by the political right wing in congress, in newspaper outlets and in the streets against Lázaro Cárdenas's migrant policy and the arrival of Spanish refugees (Alted Vigil 1999, 325), places like Mexico City eventually assimilated the Spanish refugees and migrants into public life.
3. For a short introduction to the interdisciplinary science of networks, see Newman, Barabási, and Watts (2006).
4. Nodes are "an integral part of a continuously evolving and self-constituting system" (Watts 2003, 30).
5. The idea of mapping the interactions of the Second Generation or Grupo Nepantla can be found, albeit in scattered references, in previous work by Mateo Gambarte (2015), a distinctive source from which this article has greatly benefitted.
6. "Se estaba proponiendo algo, y nos decía María Luisa: 'Sabéis lo que os digo, que todo esto es una mierda y que por mí os podéis ir todos a la hostia'. Y nos hacía aterrizar a todos" (as quoted in Mateo Gambarte 2009, 83).
7. Yo creo que una de sus facetas importantes es la de dinamizadora cultural, no en el sentido profesional, sino, digamos, en el entorno en el que vive, por su relación con Jomí y su relación con el cine y la literatura va a conectar pues con la intelectualidad, no sólo mexicana sino sudamericana, que vive en México. Conecta con Álvaro Mutis. Álvaro Mutis le presenta a García Márquez, había conocido a Eliseo Diego, a Alejo Carpentier y a gran parte de los de la revista *Órigenes* en La Habana, y después a la gente de la propia generación en México, desde Carlos Fuentes hasta García Ponce y a los miembros de la generación exiliada. (Mateo Gambarte 2012, 323)
8. See also Santana Acuña's chapter on networked creativity and the making of a work of art (113–171).
9. The address that Elío gave to her family so that they could write to her is Calle Caponata, 6 (Sarriá, Barcelona).
10. Elío writes to García Ascot: "Ayer estuvo Carlos Fuentes y le leí el cuento que te he mandado. Le gustó, según dijo él, muchísimo. Ojalá sea verdad. Dice que es mucho más redondo que el otro y que le parece realmente muy bueno. No te quiero decir lo contenta que me quedé aunque lo que de verdad me interesa es tu opinión" (Elío 1959a).

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