

Çiftetelli:

some dances last longer than castles

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"Our persistence in examining the tensions within diversity encourages growth toward our common goal. So often we either ignore the past or romanticize it, render the reason for unity useless or mythic. We forget that the necessary ingredient needed to make the past work for the future is our energy in the present, metabolizing one into the other. Continuity does not happen automatically, nor is it a passive process."

Audre Lorde (1982) Learning from the 60ies

Plan of Action

TIMELINE + COLLABORATORS

Summer 2024

Izmir + Çesme: Fieldwork and archival research, with the help of Dr. Ahmet Gürata, film scholar, Izmir University of Economics. Mapping of possible art spaces to host step 2.

Lesvos: Residency at **RHYAX collective space** (<u>Iva Radivojevic</u>), collaboration with filmmaker and storyteller <u>Tzeli Hatzidimitriou</u> and the queer community of Eressos. Meetings with <u>Mosaik Support Center</u> and <u>Siniparxi organisation</u> (Mytilene) together with <u>Nesrin Ermis</u> Pavlis, visual artist to set up Step 2.

Fall 2024

Athens: Working with the <u>Association of Descendants of Minor Asian migrants</u>, diving into archives, stories and traditions. Following classes with <u>Gadala Fotini</u>, Greek-Egyptian instructor of Oriental dance. First meetings with <u>Emantes International LGBTQIA+ Solidarity community</u>.

Nicosia: Mentoring sessions with <u>Dr Stavros Stavrou Karayiannis</u>, Dean of the European University of Cyprus, Professor of Postcolonial Literature and writer of the seminal book Dancing Fear and Desire: Race, Sexuality and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance (2004). Setting up the collaboration with the <u>Home for Cooperation</u> (UN Buffer Zone) and <u>Dance House Nicosia</u>.

Winter 2025

Brussels: Establish first circles at <u>the Green Corridor</u>, in close collaboration with the <u>YOUYOU</u> <u>group</u>, <u>The Post Collective</u> and **Dalia Ibrahim**, Oriental dance instructor at <u>SINGA Brussels</u>.

Spring 2025

Athens: Organising extensive circles at <u>Yellow Brick art space</u> in collaboration with the Athenian partners and the guidance of artist-curator <u>Vasiliki Sifostratoudaki</u>.

Summer 2025

Brussels: Reflection on the already developed methodologies of Step 2 and first attempts to clarify Step 3. In collaboration with curator <u>Sofia Dati</u> and **the Kitchen** (<u>Joachim Ben Jacoub</u>).

Fall 2025

Turkey: Organising small circles in **Izmir** and **Çesme** together with belly dancer and visual artist **Hazal Arda**. Travelling to **Istanbul** to work together with **Zeyno Erdost,** queer community organiser, member of <u>Queer Waves</u> Istanbul. Mentoring sessions with <u>Persa Myrtsou</u>, performance artist and PhD candidate in anthropology, based between Thessaloniki and Istanbul. Following master classes in Oriental dance.

Winter 2026

Egypt: First field trip together with Flemish-Egyptian **Souheila Yildiz** (belly dancer, writer) member of the Post Collective. Following master classes in Raqs Sharki and conducting research in the gueer dance scene of Cairo.

Spring - Summer 2026

Brussels + Ghent: organising extensive circles with local partners (<u>Globe Aroma</u>, <u>deKoer</u>, <u>Merhaba</u>) and experimenting with presentation formats, with the collaboration of

<u>newpolyphonies</u> (Myriam Van Imschoot) and **Youyou community** (**Hoda Siahtiri, Caroline Daish, Anissa Rouas, Luiza Amghizar**).

Fall 2026

Lesvos + Istanbul: Small circles with local partners.

Winter - Summer 2027

Brussels: Organising, reflecting and elaborating on the material and securing further funding to invite all the collaborators to Brussels for a 3 day event with happenings, lectures and workshops.





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March 14, 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Elli Vassalou: Research Grant Application of the Flemish Government, March 2024

I am pleased to be writing this letter in support of Elli Vassalou's application for a three-year fund for her research "Some Dances Last Longer than Castles."

Ms. Vassalou contacted me about the possibility of coming to Cyprus as a visiting researcher for a period of one month in the Fall of 2024. Her research focuses on Middle Eastern dance, memory, identity, and embodiment. As I perceive it, Ms Vassalou's work situates itself in the domain of activism and theory, and employs a range of epistemological approaches. Indeed, Cyprus provides a fertile ground for this mode of enquiry and offers many political dimensions that are worth examining. Indeed, Ms. Vassalou is looking to draw conclusions about the politics of identity, belonging, and memory in a postcolonial, divided Cyprus. And she is looking to accomplish this by studying dance as heritage, cultural practice, and organized art form in all communities of the island. The promise in Ms Vassalou's work and my own specialization in Midle Eastern dance, Orientalism and postcolonial theory make me optimistic about the prospect of working with her. I would be available for interviews and consultation as well as meetings with dance professionals and cultural groups on both sides of the island. The cultural scene in Cyprus will provide her with a stimulating and supportive environment that will, in turn, benefit from her involvement and research and the insights that she develops.

I would be happy to answer questions and discuss this recommendation further. Please do not hesitate to contact me at s.karayanni@euc.ac.cy or at +357 22 713133.

Yours truly,

Stavros Stavrou Karayanni (PhD)

Dean

School of Humanities, Social and Education Sciences













beursschouwburg

Thursday 14 March 2023

ATTN: Members of the selection committee for the Established Artists Grant of the Flemish Community

To whom it may concern,

I am writing the present letter to attest of my commitment to accompany and support artist Elli Vassalou in the development of her current artistic research "Çiftetelli: some dances last longer than castles".

I have collaborated with Elli on several occasions within the frame of our programs at Beursschouwburg. 2022 was a season of close collaboration with Elli and the different projects she is involved in. Beursschouwburg joined the film project On Recreation as co-producer; we hosted a residency with the Post (Film) Collective, and organized a Ciné-Assembly in which the collective invited an audience into the process of shaping a polyphonic cinematic practice. In the autumn 2022, Beursschouwburg held the second edition of Tashweesh Festival in partnership with L'Art Rue (Tunis), Tanzquartier (Vienna) and Goethe-Institut Brussels. In this context, we invited Espace Fxmme, a collective project initiated by Elli within Globe Aroma, to present Getting Softer, an installation work resulting from a series of workshops exploring, manifesting and hosting a safer, intimate space of exchange for wxmen and non binary people in the public sphere, art institutions and wxmen spaces. In November that year, we presented the threeday film program Surplus Cinema: Feminisms and Filmmaking in the Context of Greece and Intertwining Diasporas that grew into the collective Surplus Cinema with artists, filmmakers and researchers Elli Vassalou, Maria Christoforidou, Christine Phoebe and Rabab El Mouadden.

These collaborations are a testament of the different though complementary layers that come together in Elli's practice. I have seen her work as a community organizer, a host, an artist and filmmaker, and a programmer. The research project presented for the grant, inscribes itself in the continuity of these practices, maintaining a strong grounding in communal learning while also investing in her own artistic practice. With this background of multiple and ongoing collaborations, I have built an unwavering trust in Elli's work, which she carries out with thoroughness, determination and care.

We shared the space of a residency she held together with Christina Phoebe in Workspacebrussels in September 2022, in preparation for the workshop they codeveloped, titled *Camera Work as Care Work*. There, Elli shared and developed

exercises exploring the threads that connect body practice and movement to notions of care, healing and togetherness. This research "Çiftetelli: some dances last longer than castles" brings together questions that have been traversing Elli's practice through the different roles she played in past (and parallel) projects, and that, with this grant, would now have the opportunity of coming together in a coherent artistic trajectory.

It will be a pleasure for me to delve into methodological, artistic and presentation strategies with Elli in relation to this project. Accompanying this trajectory constitutes a natural step in the continuity of our curatorial exchanges, and of an ongoing, long term collaborative process with Beursschouwburg, where we hope to engage with, host and/or facilitate parts of the project.

I look forward to following the next steps of the project's development, and I remain at your disposal for any further queries.

Best wishes,

Sofia Dati Visual and audiovisual arts programmer



newpolyphonies

Re: Intention letter development grant Elli Vasalou Tsifteteli: Some Dances Last Longer Than Castles

13 March 2024, Brussels

To Whom It May Concern,

newpolyphonies is an artist-run organisation that supports the work of the YouYou Group and Myriam Van Imschoot. In the off-space Manchester based in Manchesterstreet 17, 1080 Molenbeek newpolyphonies host affiliated artists who are interested in sharing practices that relate to voice, listening and embodiment.

Elli Vasalou is a member of the YouYou Group since 2017 and, overall she is an affiliated artist of this network. Her research on the Tsifteteli has many resemblances with the way the YouYou Group has been investigating a cultural practice in a dynamic environment of cross-cultural and intergenerational co-learning. Moreover, many members of the YouYou Group practice forms of oriental dance.

With this letter we would like to confirm that we are supporting Elli's research by organizing Tsifteteli circles in our youyou gatherings and willing to create a dedicated group, led by Elli that will dive deeper into this practice. We will also act as a community for reflection on the methodologies of hosting and archiving that the research requires.

Concretely:

We budget 150 euros for the catering during the gatherings that will take place in the summer of 2024, we provide logistics (space, technical material), and we will evaluate with her how the research can develop further in the Fall of 2024. Our interest is to keep intersecting with her research through engaging our community.

Yours sincerely.

Myriam Van Imschoot / newpolyphonies, artistic coordinator

THE GREEN CORRIDOR thegreencorridor.brussels

Bosniëstraat 102 BE-1060 Brussel



Intentieverklaring.

Aan wie het aanbelangt:

The Green Corridor Brussels is een ruimte voor actief denken. Onze praktijk en gesitueerde activiteiten focussen op het genereren van collectieve kennis en de uitwisseling van werkmethodes op verschillende échelons.

Objectief is het ondervragen en in vraag stellen van wat kunst, design en andere ruimtelijke praktijken kunnen betekenen voor verschillende 'publieken', waaronder kunstenaars, architecten, designers, onderzoekers, sociaal geëngageerde activisten en vakmensen, alsook de lokale gemeenschap van Sint-Gillis.

The Green Corridor Brussels brengt een collaborating samenwerkingsverband tot stand met mogelijkheden om te exploreren en onderzoeken, om de lokale gemeenschap te versterken door gesitueerde praktijken. Peer-to-peer dialoog en collectief 'kennen door doen' staan voor ons centraal.

Met dit schrijven willen we onze interesse uitdrukken om **Elli Vassalou** uit te nodigen voor een residentie in de **winter van 2025** gefocust op 'tsifteteli/ciftetelli', een Grieks-Turkse vorm van buikdansen, in nauwe samenwerking met 'circles' als de *YOUYOU group* en *The Post Collective*. In de herfst van 2026 zal Elli terugkomen naar *The Green Corridor Brussels* om verder te werken aan het material en de resultaten te delen met verschillende doelgroepen (*workshops, happenings*, lezingen).

The Green Corridor voorziet voor de residentie het volgende: ruimte om te werken, beamer, geluid, licht en een basis aan werk infrastructuur zoals tafels en stoelen. Liselore's uitermate interessant onderzoek vergt een extra financiële inspanning, waarom ze subsidies wil aanvragen voor haar praktijk.

Als u verdere vragen heeft, aarzel dan niet ons te contacteren.

Met vriendelijke groeten,

Juan Duque kunstenaar, curator en onderzoeker. mede-oprichter The Green Corridor Sam De Vocht architect en docent mede-oprichter The Green Corridor

Jun Into Dage.

To whom it may concern,

I am writing the present letter to attest of my commitment to accompany and support artist Elli Vassalou in the development of her current artistic research *Çiftetelli: some dances last longer than castles*.

Rhyax collective space based in Eresos, Lesvos that provides physical space for extended periods of time to artists working on long term projects. The support also comes in the form of artistic and cultural exchange, collaboration and sharing.

Elli's project aligns with the embodied archives of Lesvos island and its migrational roots, bringing together queer diasporas who live and visit the island, as well as practices of community and communal joy. Elli will join *Rhyax* between July and September 2024, Her participation extends an invitation to the *Rhyax* community to a series of reading groups that circle around the notion of borderlands and experiment with her methodologies of narrative and joy around the practice of tsifteteli on the island. This would be of particular interest in Lesvos, as its close proximity with the Turkish shores, has kept the traditions of Minor Asia dances and music rather unchanged in the passage of time. Furthermore Elli will conduct interviews with locals and travel around the island in search of stories - conveniently having *Rhyax* as her residency base.

We will provide Elli an atelier which includes accommodation, and our collective kitchen and garden to organize the meetings and work on her material.

We're very much looking forward for this collaboration.

Iva Radivojević on behalf of *rhyax*: ὑύαξ collective

1 Rading

Ancestresses

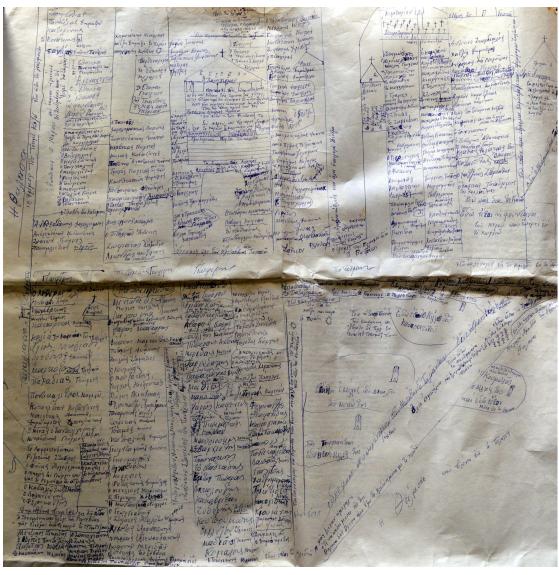
Gestures from beyond the realm of the living

In May 2019, I was working on *Sasé-istwé*, an audiovisual research project with my then partner Maxime Jean Baptiste, a French filmmaker with Guyanese and Antillean diasporic background. The project followed Maxime's histories of trauma, focusing on "L'affaire des Insurges de Cayenne", a historical event that took place between Cayenne [French Guiana] and Nantes [France] in the interwar period 1922-1923. As we were working on the archival material of the trial, going through newspapers of the time and testimonies of the insurgents, I could feel the vibration of those people's bodies through their fingerprints, photos and stories. I would go to sleep every night deeply affected. One of these nights, my great-grandmother came to visit me in my dream. With her dynamic as-always posture, with one hand on her hip, waving to me the other, she said "Why are you working on those people's history? Who is going to work on mine?". I woke up in tears and awe, was this her ghost? Or is it psycho-historical entanglement? 1922-1924 were the years of the Greco-Turkish war and population exchange, when my great-grandmother and 1.6 million people were displaced¹.

How can I listen to this voice from beyond the realm of the living and make it my own voice? How can I work with her history as an artist, a migrant myself in a foreign land? How can this story be relevant for others?

¹ This landmark event set a legal precedent for population management on the basis of religious or ethnic difference. Similar segregative policies—such as creating walls, partitions, and apartheids—have followed in its wake. Strikingly, the exchange was purportedly enacted as a means to achieve peace. Humanism in Ruins. Aslı Iğsız (2018) Entangled Legacies of the Greek-Turkish Population Exchange





Herstory

100 years ago my great grandmother would jump on a boat from Kato Panagia, Çeşme, Smirna region, Minor Asia to old Greece, with her husband and a baby in her arms, taking with her only a few heirlooms and her character. She was a fierce woman, coming from a genealogy of women with economic power and control of their own, and their families' future.

Unfortunately, her situated power was taken away from her as history took her path. In a historical moment of powerful nationalistic narratives, and the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, there she was, saying goodbye to her motherlands and wearing a new identity, that of the refugee, the "tourkosporos" (the Turkish seed), the "pastrikia" (too clean thus a sex worker), the "pardali" (flamboyant/queer) as the Greeks would call her and her daughters. The role of the women in mainland Greece, was different, permitting only housework and fieldwork but not presence in the public sphere, unable to debate or run businesses and households. Wars: Balkan wars, World Word I, II, civil war, and two dictatorships, stripped these women of their ability to feel joy, express themselves, dance, and raise their children in safety. I only remember her being joyful in her garden of watermelons, which she worked on until she was 95. I remember her as a severe figure: sleeping with an axe under her pillow, always ready for the worst, although my Egyptian-Greek aunt told me, she was "shaking that ass" in house parties and weddings.

The women from Smyrna, today's Izmir - *Gavur Izmir*²- but also from the wide constellation of cities and islands of the eastern Aegean had a strong matriarchal history, culture and myth. Smyrna, Efessos, Eressos and more cities of the region took their names of their Amazon queens that created them in the Ionian era. Ephesian Artemis, Cybelle, Mother Mary were worshipped unstoppably through the centuries in the same locations. From antiquity, important women created space, art and spirituality in these lands that still stand today. Greek and Turkish folklore names women of Smyrna as witches, insightful and powerful, of extraordinary beauty and wit. What remains of these women? Where can we trace these fragmented pieces of female power? Can tsifteteli dance connect us back with them? Can we create a vocabulary of gestures and dance moves, rooted in our different diasporic trajectories through history and land, that reveal our common and uncommon ground? How can our relation with movement reveal our past and also by sharing: listening to our stories and mixing our body's topographies, create a common future, and new traditions?

²Gavur Izmir is a name given to Smyrna, in Ottoman times, meaning Infidel or foreign, mainly because of its secular, metropolitan character and its multiethnic multi-religious population.

"Once we stop defining tradition as resistance to modernity, the term becomes again a means of raising essential questions that necessarily include issues of authority as well as invention, practice as well as interpretation. Tradition becomes a newly complex, open-ended subject".

Clifford James (2004). Traditional futures.

Ourstory

This research starts with me, sharing my memories and family narratives of migration and embodiment in the borderlands of newly-born nation-states. It is an invitation to other women and queer people, to open up their bodies, memories and archives, to make a new story together. As Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation" signifies a methodology that combines historical and archival research with critical theory and fictional narrative - our personal herstories unwritten, fragmented, marginalised and silenced have the potential to include us all and be part of building our common futures.



< NO SIE SXATHATIA HIT EK KATA PANAFIAS M. ASIAS



MHNIAION OPFANON TON SYAAOFIKON KAI SYNETAIPIKON ZHTHMATON TON ARANTAXOY EK KATO RANAFIAS M.ASIAS-

Έτος 20ν-Περίοδος Α΄ - 'Αριθ. φύλλου 10- Αύγουστος 1957- Έδρα 'Αθήναι, Μενάνδρου 48

Πρός τό πλήρωμα της Κάτω Παναγιάς.

'Ayanntol Toura-Tototes !

"Excursy the tendera "Εχώμεν την τεμήννα σάςπαρακαλέσωμενόπως στό Μοσχίτο στόν Ναό Τόσον τό Δεοικητε μαξι μέ τὰ στό Μοσχίτο στόν Ναό Τόσον τό Δεοικητε μέλη τῶν ο εκογενειῶν τοῦ Σωτήρος ὁπου θὰ κὸν συμβούλεον τῆς Ε ξωμε τὴν καὶ τὴν πανήγυρη τοῦ Κωρεοῦ μας καὶ τῆς Ε αρτοκλασίας. Κατόπεν Έκτελεστική Επιτρονώματας νῶσεως μας, τὴν Ι Σην ώς εκακολουθήση δεξί πὴ τοῦ 'Αορτασμοῦ, Αὐγούστου, ἡμέρχιμέμ, ωσες σὲ παρακείμενο περακαλοῦν θερμά τοὺς Η ΕΚΙ πτη καὶ ῶρα Ͽη π. μ. Κέντρο.

ΕΝΩΣΙΣ

ΤΩΝ ΑΠΑΝΤΑΧΟΥ ΕΚ ΚΑΤΟ ΠΑΝΑΓΙΑΣ ΜΙΚΡΑΣ ΑΣΙΑΣ

ΕΔΡΑ ΑΘΗΝΑΙ, ΜΕΝΑΝΔΡΟΥ 48

HPOSKAHSIS

προσέλθωσεν στήν πανή-

γυριν οικογενειακώς. Έξαιρετικά έφέτος πρέπει νὰ παρευρεθούμε δλοι στην πανήγυρη, γιὰ νὰ φανή ή ένότητα καί ή άδελφωσύνη του χω-ριού μας. Νὰ ἀποδεί-ξωμε την σύμπνοια καί καί την ἀλληλεγγύη του πληρώματος της Κάτω Παναγιάς. πρέπει να παρευρεθούμε

Η ΕΚΤΕΛΕΣΤΙΚΗ ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗ ΕΟΡΤΑΣΜΟΥ



'Από την πανήγυρη στην Κάτω Παναγεά-Δεκαπεντα'

ø105 1910 ~~~~~

ΚΑΤΩΠΑΝΑΓΙΟΥΣΙΚΟΙ Α Ν Τ Ι Λ Α Λ Ο Ι

ΤΑ Ν Α Υ Ρ Ι

Γιά λάτε νά γυρίσωμε ένα τρίτο τοῦ αἰδινα πίου. "Ας προσπαθήσωμε φίλοι, Πατριώτες, Χωριανοί. "Ας δυμηγέρωμε τόν Κατε παναγιούσικο δεκαπεντάουστα. "Ας ἀφίσωμε τόν κατε παναγιούσικο δεκαπεντά του διαναντά το παναγιούσικο δεκαπεντά τον διαναντά διαναντά το παναγιούσια δεκαπεντά τον διαναντά το παναντά διαναντά το παναντά διαναντά διαναντά το παναντά διαναντά το παναντά το παναντά διαναντά το παναντά διαναντά το παναντά το παναντά το παναντά το παναντά το παναντά τά φιαχου τό εσημέρι, τον όμορ-εριπί, τσιμε πι, κι' άλλοι άνικο, τά κει-ι τόν φελπένο 3. Τό ίδιο και παιδιά όλοι εξ-

φάχου | πού είναι καί, μπακάλικο μαζί, είκου είναι και μπαχάλιχο μαζί, εξ-ναι πολύς κόσμος. Πρό πάντων ξέ-νοι. Ξένοι ἀπό τη Χιό, τον Τσε-ομέ, τ' Αλάτοατα και πολλοί χω-οιανοί - « νωνιά τοῦ χαφενά είνα:

το άνικα, τά κειτό ι τόν φελπένο του τό, υ ντέφ του της
του τό, υ ντέφ του της
παιδιά δλοι είκαλά τους.
φενέ του Θεοχάρη,
πανο τοῦ ντεφ καὶ κάνει ενα



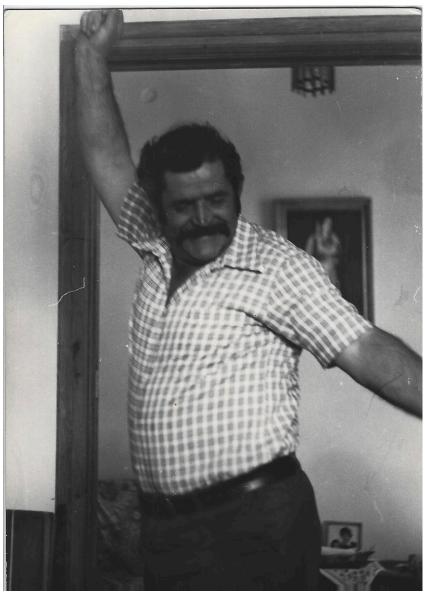


Table of figures

late 19th century

Capture 1: Black and white photo of Elli's aunt Mary and grandfather Yiorgos Vassalos dancing Egyptian Çiftetelli (τσιφτετέλι αράπικο), photographer Stelios Vassalos, Athens 1977 **Capture 2:** Daguerreotype of the family of the grand-grandfather of Elli, Yiorgos Diamantas, photographer unknown, Kato Panagia (today Çiftlik Koyu), Ottoman Empire,

Capture 3: map of the village of Kato Panagia, drawn in 1960 by memory of the refugees who survived the destruction of the village in September 1922, archive of the association of descendants of Kato Panagia. photographed by Elli Vassalou, Athens 2024

Capture 4: Elli dancing her first steps of tsifteteli, photographed by Stelios Vassalos, Athens 1986.

Capture 5: Newspaper from the archives of the association of descendants of Kato Panagia 1957

Capture 6: Photography printed on cotton: Kiki, grandmother of Elli and grandfather Yiorgos, dancing Waltz at a home celebration. Printed and embroidered by Elli Vassalou, Brussels 2022.

Capture 7: Yiorgos Vassalos dancing Zeimpekiko at a home celebration 1977, Athens 1977

Capture 8: A glimpse of Bibliography, Elli Vassalou, Brussels 2024

