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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
a) Structure of this study.....	6
b) Research Methods	7
The reason for selecting this sample group	8
Interviews and sample group profile	9
The translation process (Albanian-English).....	10
c) Research Model	12
1. Research Literature	14
1.1. Christmas, materialism and multiculturalism	15
1.2. Christmas markets	19
1.3. Christmas gift-giving	21
1.4. Christmas and family	24
1.5. Christmas tree and other decorations	31
1.6. Islam and its relation to Christmas	33
2. Religious and cultural dimensions of Christmas celebrations	38
2.1. Findings.....	39
a) Christmas: cultural or religious?	41
b) Christmas as a twin-peaked festival and its associations with New Year's	47
c) Adapting and Negotiating Christmas rituals	51
d) Consumerism, Europeanization and Christmas Affordances	66
e) Atmosphere and activities in public and private spheres.....	69
Conclusion	77
Bibliography	81
Interviews	86
Abstract English	87
Abstract German.....	87

Introduction

I remember my first Christmas in Vienna. Just a month before, in November 2012, I had recently moved there to live and study. As I got there, I saw that every corner of the lighted and decorated city was filled with people. To me, a 20-year-old Muslim woman, none of those elements seemed that unusual, because I always thought that the decorations were set up to celebrate New Year's. From my previous experiences in my homeland, at that time, I didn't know about the attention other countries give to Christmas. Although I didn't find those activities important or unusual whatsoever, wintertime in that environment gave me a good feeling. It was a change for me, and I liked that new kind of change.

Soon I got to meet an Austrian family. At some point they wanted to know where I was going to spend Christmas. I explained that I had to work, therefore I was going to spend it in Vienna. The sad expression on their faces right after I told them about my plans, was something I wasn't expecting. At the time I was living in a student dormitory with an Albanian friend. The family I am talking about, already knew this and the fact that I was going to spend Christmas alone, away from family, made them feel very sad for me. In my home country, I wasn't used to considering Christmas that important. In that sense, back then, I couldn't stop but think: why would they get so sad about me being alone in Vienna?

However, each year that I got to know the Austrian society better, I began to understand their concern and the significance and value this holiday had in their life. I spotted the effort they put into preparing authentic Christmas gifts for each other. I saw the fir tree outside in the backyard of their house, wrapped with a netting machine, so it would be easier for them to transport it. I asked myself, why they would leave the wrapped tree outside, instead of decorating it inside. I was used to the traditions in my home country, where we usually decorate our trees in November.

Ever since I moved to Vienna, I always held a part-time job to finance my studies. About three years ago, I got a job in a Silver Shop in the city center, and during these three years especially, I've come to understand Christmas more than ever. I have come to realize the stressful behaviour people would show during the "*Weihnachtsgeschäft*" (Christmas shopping), while observing them as they come into the shop where I work, looking to buy gifts for their loved

ones and trying to find the perfect Christmas tree. Personally, I wasn't used to receiving Christmas gifts until I got to experience it from my Austrian friends that I mentioned above. Even now, every year, they always gift me symbolic Christmas presents. However, this was not reciprocal until two years ago. That is one of the reasons why the first year in Vienna and specifically the situation with work colleagues at my current job were quite embarrassing in this regard. In the last two years, I would get gifts from everyone for Christmas, but they would not expect the same from me, except when I would pitch-in for getting our boss a gift. I thought they weren't going to get me anything, since they already knew I was Muslim, and that, as customs have it, I was not necessarily supposed to participate in such rituals. Since it was the last workday before Christmas Eve, I had to run as fast as I could after work to get something for them. That got me by surprise, all unprepared, therefore it made me feel stressed. However, the next year I had already understood how the tradition works, and I simply began to perceive it as a new cultural obligation for me. That's why the next year I was attentive and bought everybody a present.

As you may realize, I join such rituals because the dominance of Christmas practices which surround me during that time of the year in Vienna, have shaped my actions. Finding out the way other Muslims engage themselves on this occasion, has motivated and led me to the idea of expanding my interest into researching this field closer.

a) Structure of this study

Introduction: This chapter presents the inception of the idea of writing about Christmas and how it became part of my daily life, which encouraged me to explore this topic further. In this section I have elaborated the main question and the empirical methods of the research. Furthermore, this chapter is needed to present the sample group profile and the reason for selecting this sample group. It describes the research model, precisely the Grounded Theory, chosen for the analysis of the data. Since the interviews were conducted and transcribed in Albanian, and the relevant passages then translated into English, the process of translation is also described at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 1: Literature Review: To illustrate the phenomenon, this section begins with an explanation of the history and specifically the origin of Christmas celebration. Consequently,

the goal was to lead the research into further and expanded exploration that explains the importance of Christmas nowadays, as a concept of modernism, materialism and multiculturalism. The following topics discussed in this chapter are Christmas markets, Christmas gift-giving, Christmas and family and Christmas tree and other decorations. The end of this chapter discusses Islam and its relation to Christmas. Overall, this chapter was a summary of the literature supporting my study.

Chapter 2: Religious and cultural dimensions of Christmas: Within Christmas traditions and rituals, some key elements such as the Christmas tree and decorations, gift-giving, visiting Christmas markets and feasting, are familiar not only to religious majority groups, but also to minority groups, as they are about to be explored further in the main chapter, referring to data from the participants of this study.

Conclusion: Main conclusions are presented based on data analysis.

b) Research Methods

This study addresses the following research question:

“How do Albanian Muslims that live in Vienna practice Christmas, what experiences do they have with this festivity, and what role does Christmas play in the social situation, as a celebration of the dominant societies religion?”

In order to address this question, the research needed to be qualitatively approached. The data collection took place in February 2020, and the participants were Albanian Muslims who immigrated or came to study in Vienna. The interviews were conducted at the participants' homes. As the social anthropologist Sarah Pink once mentioned, *“the home is an intimate context, it is private and it is where private conversations and activities are played out”*, their home's atmosphere is the one that helped to *“generate a sense of intimacy, confidentiality and trust”* (Pink, et al. 2017, 95).

The sample includes three open interviews overall and the participants are marked as anonymous. The first two interviews are group interviews, which further include two to four participants. In this case, I coded them as the Berisha and Gashi family. The last interview

includes a single person, who I coded as Vesa. Therefore, the Berisha family code includes two perspectives, that of the husband (Mr. Berisha) and of the wife (Mrs. Berisha) of the family. Following the same logical gap, I also coded the children who participated in the Gashi family interview as Liza and Olt.

This study focuses on Albanian Muslims and their engagement with Christmas celebrations, and the next chapter of this thesis in particular, explores the opinions and alternatives Muslims have and choose, regarding the celebration of this holiday. As I have already observed, Christmas has genuinely become more cultural than religious; this can be proved by the fact that many other religious groups rather than Catholics participate in this festivity while holding other religious beliefs. In order to explain the behaviour of Muslims that do partake in the celebration of Christmas, I have firstly looked at Islam and its relations to Christmas.

At the final stage of my study, specifically by the last chapter, I am going to present the results of the data that I have collected from my empirical research, which indicate the participants' behaviour and engagement with Christmas celebrations, conducted in Vienna during the last Christmas season 2019.

The reason for selecting this sample group

The reason why I selected this sample group is due to the fact that my thesis addresses the topic of Muslim families who engage with Christmas celebration in one way or the other. I am Albanian, I come from Kosovo, and I identify myself as Muslim. I have facilitated the participants' access, since we all come from Kosovo, and I personally know them for almost eight years. This fact made the access to them very stress-free. The interaction before the interview was informative, intense, but not very long, as for months we were in continuous communication, and they were conscious of what would be discussed. There was one contact person from each family (Mrs. Berisha and Mr. Gashi), whom I communicated with all the time and arranged the intervals of the interviews, as well as other spontaneous visits.

They felt free to share their thoughts and opinions with me and they didn't hesitate to welcome me to their homes anytime during the Christmas period. I had already known their background experiences, their current professions and their religious beliefs, though I hadn't been familiar

with the activities and rituals they do for Christmas. Therefore, I visited them more than usual, so that I could observe their daily routines and activities during that time of the year.

Interviews and sample group profile

The first interview (with the Berisha family) was realized in the end of February 2020, at their apartment in Vienna. Mr. Berisha (37) came to study in Vienna by himself in the year 2007 and lives and engages in its society since then. He has a University degree in Sociology and works in an Albanian organization. His wife (29) and her family immigrated to Vienna during the period of the last war in Kosovo, precisely in the year 1998. Currently, she is a student at the University of Vienna and works as a manager in an Austrian company. They have two children together, a 4-year-old son who goes to kindergarten, and a 1-year old daughter.

The second interview was conducted with the Gashi family, also at their apartment in Vienna. Mr. Gashi (43) came to study in Vienna in the year 2004 and graduated in Islamic Theology. He works as a teacher of Islamic religion. His wife came to live in Vienna two years later in 2006. She is currently holding a part-time job at a shop. They have three children together: two daughters (11 and 4) and a son (9). The two older children attend a primary school in Vienna, while the little daughter goes to kindergarten.

The third interview with Vesa was completed in a student dormitory, accurately in the participants room. She has been living there since she came to study in Vienna, in the year 2016. She is now 25 years old and studies Architecture at the Technological Faculty in Vienna. She held a part-time job at a restaurant.

All the Interviews were audio-recorded, whereas their length ranged from 40 to 45 minutes. My request of interviewing them was well received from almost all the participants of this study. The Gashi family was a little sceptical at first, thinking that they would not be able to help me, as they are not directly involved with Christmas celebrations. Other than that, all participants offered their time for this study and gave me the opportunity to contact them if I had any further questions, which I actually did a few times before and after the official interviews.

I and Vesa were engaged with some Christmas activities like visiting Christmas markets, going to a Christmas Party and spending Christmas Eve together. I also wished to be part of one of the children's Christmas parties, but it was non-permissible, since I was an outsider.

The interviews were conducted in Albanian and each interview began with the same question: “How do you celebrate Christmas, and could you please tell me, what you find more or less important within Christmas celebrations and rituals?”. Since the questions were open and not structured, I asked many follow-up questions, which were not on my question paper, depending on their answers, because it was important to interact and deepen the conversation. Some of the questions asked during the interviews were: “Could you please tell me, what routines you have during Christmas time? What events do you participate in? How do you prepare for Christmas? Is there something that you must do in particular? What association does Christmas have for you? How was your last Christmas? Who decides how to decorate the tree? Do you practice rituals like eating Christmas dinner, or decorating the tree each Christmas? Do you take photos, and if yes could I see some of them?”.

Besides the official interviews, some other observations and informal discussions made during the surrounding months of Christmas 2019 were also attached. The participants were asked to take notes or to write down a to-do-list in which they would number the activities they’d participate in, what they would buy and what other things regarding Christmas they would take care of.

The interviews were then transcribed in Albanian, generating 47 pages of transcripts and ten other pages of field notes, attached to some other materials as well.

The translation process (Albanian-English)

Although (almost) every participant that contributed to this process possesses good knowledge of German and English, we decided to conduct these interviews in Albanian (our mother tongue). The process of obtaining and transcribing data was much simpler and clearer than the process of translating it. I must say that during these interviews, the interlocutors spoke at the same time in many cases. Therefore, they made it difficult for me to understand and transcribe their conversation into Albanian, and even harder to translate it into English.

Although the interviews were held in Albanian, every one of them contained ongoing expressions of words in German or English. For example: Weihnachten - Christmas, Weihnachtsmärkte, Christkindlmarkt - Christmas market, Weihnachtsgeschenke, Weihnachtsfeier - Christmas Party and Weihnachtsmann - Santa Claus. For instance, “*Weihnati*” (a word which does not exist in German) is a word used for Christmas, which originates from the German word “Weihnachten”. Albanians have modified this word into

“Weihnati” and accordingly they mix its original pronunciation with the Albanian one. Some words (for example the ones used for Christian rituals or the ones referred to New Year’s Eve or celebrations), were originally pronounced in Albanian and translating them properly into English needed some extra and careful focus. In this case, I could notice that the tradition of participating in this ritual has made them feel closer to the names of the holidays they celebrate, particularly New Year’s, rather than Christmas. Some of the words mentioned, like *“Weihnachtsfeier”* or *“Christkindlmarkt”* have no equivalent term in the Albanian language nor does the event itself exist there. That’s why it was easier for the participants to use the words that already exist in German and English. Speaking of that, some participants have also mentioned that they use the German nomenclature in these cases, because the Albanian one doesn’t give them the same feeling of significance as German does.

During the interview with the Gashi family, two terms in Albanian were used to refer to Christmas, one in singular and the other in plural (*“Kërshëndella-t”* and *“Krishtlindje-t”*). This was a little confusing to translate, since in English we only use one word (*‘Christmas’*) to refer to this holiday. There were some other cases that led to confusion as well. I would like to mention that Albanians use two different words; Catholic (*katolik*) and Christian (*krishter*), because they wouldn’t exactly define the differences between the two terms. The same problem appeared as the informants used three or even more words to refer to the Christmas tree, and some other Christmas elements. In these cases, proper translation required more concentration, research and time, therefore the speed of the writing usually slowed down. After I thoroughly analysed the crucial sections of the interviews, I tried to make the proper effort with the English translation and make it as clear and appropriate as possible for the readers. Yet certainly, through translation, the meaning of some phrases could not be presented exactly as their original. I found the difficulties in translation inevitable, considering that I was dealing with three languages: Albanian, German and English. The use of each term in the languages mentioned above has sometimes made the meaning of some of the expressions inexplicable or inappropriate in translation. That is why sometimes they diminished their significance.

Since language is a very important component of communicating, as well as expressing opinions and thoughts, we came to the decision of conducting our interviews in our mutual mother tongue. It was genuinely agreeable that; firstly, the participants would feel freer and more willing to express their opinions. Secondly, I would feel more secure, confident and

concentrated during the important part of the interview, which is the content of the conversation, rather than giving attention to unimportant details such as speaking and articulating sentences properly in a second or even third language.

c) Research Model

According to the “all is data” principle of Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser’s (1967) Grounded Theory, the researcher collects, codes and analyses the data. The data collection and its coding and analysis is the underlying operation. “*The generation of theory, coupled with the notion of theory as process*” requires all these three components to be conducted together as much as possible. This should be continually intertwined from the beginning of the research until the end of it (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 43).

The next stage of the analysis is the theoretical sampling, which gives the researcher the purpose and confidence to the enterprise. The researcher then “*develops strong confidence in his categories, since they have emerged from the data and are constantly being selectively reformulated by them*” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 76).

Regarding the research, as Kathy Charmaz mentioned that “*grounded theorists start with data*” the data found on my study, was constructed through interviews, materials such as field notes, observations, transcripts, photos and informal discussions. I began to separate and sort the data through open and axial coding. “*As grounded theorists, we study our early data and begin to separate, sort and synthesize these data through qualitative coding. Coding means that we attach labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about. Coding distills data, sorts them and gives us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data. Grounded theorists emphasize what is happening in the scene when they code data*” (Charmaz 2006, 3).

Since the data was collected in Albanian as well as transcribed in Albanian, I firstly selected the relevant passages and then translated them into English. The translated and summarized passages became part of the analysis. Several codes such as “Christmas, religious or cultural?”, “Christmas elements and the adaption of such elements” developed as a result of the interviews with the participants. These codes along with my own ideas later helped me to further explore

such areas. I compared the information gained from each interview and then started to theorize and write down the ideas and codes, as well as their relation to each other in memos. That helped me develop the next steps of the analysis. At the same time, it was necessary to research and integrate the literature on the emerging categories.

1. Research Literature

As we talk about winter season, it often connotes to the various holidays that get celebrated during this time period. Christmas, for instance, is one concrete example of the celebrational motives winter season can bring to life. Christmas enters multicultural and multi-religious public and private spaces. If we take a quick moment to analyse the atmosphere that gets generated as a result of this occasion, as well as the general behaviour that people demonstrate during this time, we can easily detect a few interesting details. To portray these details and elements, I will begin my study with an explanation of the origin of Christmas.

The various names that numerous Europeans have given to this festival, throws a certain amount of light on its history itself. For example: The English word *Christmas*, and the equivalent of its Dutch word “*Kerstmis*”, refer to the ecclesiastical side of the festival; “*Weihnacht*” or the sacred night, is vaguer and it might be either pagan or Christian. At this point, it seems to be Christian, since it doesn’t appear earlier than the year 1000, when faith was first established in Germany. Christmas and “*Weihnacht*” may stand then for the distinctively Christian festival. “*Calendas*” or “*Calenos*”, the Polish “*Kolenda*”, the Russian “*Kolyáda*” and the Gaelic “*Calluinn*” for New Year’s Eve derive all from Latin “*Kalendae*”, which connects Christmas with the Roman New Year’s Day. The Kalends or the first day of January, is a time when many festive rituals get celebrated (Miles 1912, 21-25).

The Albanian word “*Kërshëndella*” (*Këndellje* recovery/reborn/sobering of Christ) is equivalent to the Latin word “*Christi Natalia*”. “*Krishtlindje*” (The birth of Christ) is another word used in some Albanian regions, which supposedly got translated later from the Greek word “*Christoúenna*” (Çabej 1976, 280).

Christmas is the fairest time of the year, for the generous celebration of which, people save money the whole year. It is a holiday in which the seasonal habitus of belonging is a part of the people, whether they belong to the same religious community or not (Klassen and Scheer 2019).

The origin and history of this festivity and its fixed date on December 25th, occurred about the middle of the fourth century in Rome and it is seen as an evidence to tense political and social events in early European history. The early Christians were only familiar with the Passover

festival as a commemoration of Christ's Lord's Supper. Gradually, a flood of calendars set in, according to which Christ's life and his birthday were to be set. On December 25th, they celebrated the birthday of the son of god. The celebration included extensive temple celebrations and circus races for all social classes. The celebration of the birth of Christ is seen as a religious-political setting, growing out of the efforts of the representatives of the Christian Church to replace, absorb and switch over the pagan spiritual currents within the Roman Empire (Weber-Kellermann 1978, 10-13).

Alongside it is also mentioned that Christmas derived not only from one but from three Roman festivals; the Kalends, Saturnalia and Dies Natalis Solis Invicti. New Christian elements were based on the devotion of the family, symbolized by Jesus in the crib next to Joseph and Mary. *"If we take for example, the relationship between the Kalends and Saturnalia we start with what could be described as twin-peaked festival. On the one hand rituals of inversion and on the other an emerging relationship between lavish expenditure and the domestic sphere. The third festival of Dies Natalis Solis Invicti adds a tradition of syncretism and incorporation, which turns the festival into what is still a treat for folklore studies. All of this has been related to three major contradictions in contemporary Christmas* (Miller 2017, 436).

The following section covers Christmas and Materialism. The connection between these two elements, has been researched by many scholars such as Miller, Hirschmann, Ruvio, Touzani and Bowler, whose main theories on the subject will be elaborated below.

1.1. Christmas, materialism and multiculturalism

The anthropologist Daniel Miller argues that Christmas has become central to the three most important struggles that can be defined as being modern. The first one is the relationship with family and kinship, which as a topic finds itself at the heart of anthropology. The second one is the desire to be part of the globe in its entirety, without losing the sense of local origin or relation

to the places we come from. The third stands for our problematic relationship to consumerism and materialism (Miller 2017, 410).

Christmas has been relatively often and well deliberated, knowing that it remains the most studied religious holiday in marketing literature. Most of the investigations regarding it are linked to the gift-giving ritual or the food practices during this time of the year. As Miller also points out, the expenses on marketplace products such as food or gifts, is identified not as an invasion of the secular into the sacred, but that of the sacred into commercialism. *“The result seems to be less a celebration of materialism than a sacralization of shopping”* (Miller 1993, 149); (Hirschmann, Ruvio and Touzani 2011, 430).

“Christmas is the biggest single event on the planet. No sports tournament, war, stadium rock tour, viral media sensation, or global marketing campaign affects as many people around the world every year as Christmas. It is a phenomenon that engages billions of people who are caught up in its commercialism, music, sentiment, travel, and busyness whether they personally celebrate the holiday or not” (Bowler 2017, 154).

Nowadays, Christmas is one of the most celebrated festivals worldwide, which connotes to a period of family togetherness. It's this exact period that Christmas uses to achieve the bridging role in the world. Christmas retains the twin-peaked structure in many countries, based on its relations to some other festivals such as New Year's (Miller 2017, 436-439).

New Year's in ancient Rome, i.e. in the pre-Christian centuries, began on March 1st. That was the beginning of business time, as the offices and consuls started working. Later in the 2nd century before Christ, around January 1st of the year 153, it was celebrated for the first time. The *“Calandae Januariae”* became a great celebrational festival since Caesar, whereas Saturnalia was applied until the Imperial period. The festival of Saturnalia achieved its highest peak by December 17th, as its festive forms shaped and influenced calendar customs significantly. Hence, the Roman calendar festivals had a general effect on the New Year's traditions of European Christianity, as well as that of the Germans. The church on the other hand, whose annual year count began with the first Advent Sunday, did not have much in common with New Year's Eve. New Year's in that matter is a worldwide celebrational festival, which has in its centerpiece the element of noise making. Despite of police prohibitions, during

this night uncountable shootings and banging can be heard. The origin of elements such as shooting, could be interpreted as a form of exuberance among the defence against demons (Weber-Kellermann 1978, 180).

Each nation has fashioned its own Christmas customs, and we must note that to this point, in the mid-nineteenth century, the crystallization of modern Christmas attributes from different regional sources, began to be perceived as only homogenized, with no regional basis. This syncretic modern form extracts the Christmas tree, as an invented tradition of Germans; the filling of stockings, as a Dutch tradition; Santa Claus, as a mainly US tradition; the Christmas card as an invention of the British, and so on. Such specific local elements reflect a picture of a quite spectacular heterogeneity (Miller 1993, 3-4).

The waves of Christmas globalization were firstly noticed through the ‘German Christmas’, the one that spread rapidly in Europe and then in the USA, throughout Coca Cola’s Americanised invention of Santa Claus (Löw 2019, 72).

Nowadays Christmas has increased its *“commercial attention, so that today it is as though all the other festivals had been emptied out and replaced by this one last celebration that now stands as the symbol of the very idea of an annual festival”* (Miller 2017, 410).

Miller mentioned that *“Christmas has grown in global terms to be celebrated in many countries that are not Christian and had no previous Christmas tradition”* (Miller 2017, 410). Therefore, this last quotation could relate to the participants of this study, which are included in the group mentioned by Miller, i.e. that of the people who are not Christian and had no previous Christmas tradition. Phrases like the one from Miller, lead me to the facts and conclusions that I am going to present in the second chapter of this study.

The modern tradition of Christmas has not been acknowledged or performed necessarily only by Christians, but it has also conquered areas characterized by non-Christian traditions, or people of other religions too: *“Indeed Christmas is today the global festival and it is obviously an aim of any comparative appraisal of Christmas, such as this one, to explain why this should have happened and what qualities of Christmas differentiate it from all other festivals”* (Miller 1993, 5).

The anthropologist and ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss argues that in the period after World War II, the French Christmas was materialized and expanded in an unknown way under the influence of the USA. He mentioned the tall trees that suddenly appeared at night with magic lightening. At the same time while wrapping presents, people were dressed as Father Christmas, listening to the requests of their children in department stores (Lévi-Strauss, *Der gemarterte Weihnachtsmann* 2014, 16); (Löw, *Christmas Studies* 2019, 70); (Lévi-Strauss 1993, 40)

The book about Christmas work edited by two anthropologists Pamela E. Klassen and Monique Scheer, shows how Christmas celebrations are established in multicultural contexts. This book helps reveal the way the concepts of religion and culture function, as well as questions their belonging and differences. Most importantly, it shows that whether this particular holiday has a history connected to Christianity or not, it is above all considered a “public holiday”. Every year in this winter period, we can notice many practices that get commodified with Christmas. The most common ones are the marketplaces and calendars, adding even more seasonally habituated practices of a considerable number of people, who belong to a wide range of communities. These communities are often non-Christian ones and the fact that Christmas has become more cultural than religious, is genuinely obvious. Therefore we can come to a conclusion which states that Christmas is not just for Christians anymore, if it ever was (Klassen and Scheer 2019, 8).

In multi-religious and “non-religious” regions of Europe and the USA, Christians and non-Christians as well as non-religious individuals are coming to observe the dependence of the cultural omnipresence of Christmas on the infrastructure of Christian public memory. This infrastructure of memory is materialized through Christian affordances, such as buildings, churches, street corners, workplaces, markets, kindergartens and schools. The ways in which the public requests of people depend on this often-obscured memory infrastructure of Christians’ narratives, calendars and symbols of their rhetorical appeals are pointed out through affordances (Klassen and Scheer 2019, 8-9).

These calendars, narratives and symbolic ritual practices during the season of greetings, carry Christian messages. Symbols such as candles, wreaths, Christmas trees and lights, serve as a code for the winter season and especially for the time of Advent and Christmas. Put together, the practices mentioned above produce a seasonal habitus of Christmas. Through the shared

food, feasting, songs and gift-giving, Christmas festivities become the hope that cultural differences can be overcome together. *“At the same time, Christmas celebrations necessarily evoke multicultural awkwardness -or even aggression- due to the ways that the liturgical root of Christmas unavoidably reminds some people, whether Christians or non-Christians, of the potentially all-inclusive theology of redemption in which God forgives every human being’s sins through the birth (incarnation) of Jesus”* (Klassen and Scheer 2019, 9).

As a matter of fact, Christmas mostly connotes with winter, wreaths, Christmas trees and lights, as something that symbolizes the winter season. This could be seen as a cliché, since this fact stands only for countries in which Christmas is celebrated in winter. While most parts of the world expect to see a white Christmas with slight winter chills, there are countries that are on the other side of the hemisphere, precisely southern (Australia, New Zealand, Madagascar, South Africa, Argentina etc.) and therefore celebrate Christmas in the summer. This narrative should be discussed more in the research literature and observe Christmas in general, which includes the other hemisphere of the globe.

According to all that has been mentioned by the authors until today, Miller finds the right words to describe the process of materialism as “the first true global festival”, and as “the last true local festival”: *“Today it is the time of family togetherness and also of family quarrelling, the first true global festival and the last true local festival, the expression of materialism but also apparently its repudiation”* (Miller 2017, 436).

Since I have already elaborated some interesting aspects of Christmas history and the concept of materialism discussed by many scholars, I would like to move forward by addressing some theories regarding the elements of Christmas celebrations. The following chapter outlines elements such as Christmas markets, Christmas gift-giving, Christmas and family, Christmas tree and other decorations.

1.2. Christmas markets

The bright lights, the loud laughter, the warm drinks in cold weather, the traditional food along with the sounds of different communicative languages, the liveliness of people who are often

wearing headscarves or giant crosses over their body, smiling at each other even if they're strangers, gives one the impression and feeling of unity and belongingness. One can perceive it as living a special moment, that can be experienced only once a year. The light decorations among the large number of wood cabinets, which put together provide the so-called "Christmas market", bring together hundreds or even thousands of tourists. One can notice the queue waiting to get a drink or eat some 'Wurst', or to buy special, hand-made Christmas gift. The highlighted and frequent movement of people plays a huge role, since it's the one that gives the city a colourful view and an invigorating and energetic atmosphere.

The spectacular "Christkindlmarkt" held in front of the "Rathaus" (city hall) in Vienna is open for visitors from the end of November until the end of December. Visiting the markets in Vienna is a must for people staying in Vienna during this time of the year. (McCune 1993).

"Das Schenken" (gift-giving) as one of the main discussions regarding Christmas celebration, has been praised for generations. In the last century, its significance has been scolded by reaching the highest level of consume terror, as if the whole gift-giving was nothing more than an invention of profitable merchants. This is noticeable in the history of Christmas markets, which is older and more complex than the department and advertising stores. Not only in Berlin, Dresden or Vienna where a typical Christmas market always takes place, but in every other place they concentrated on building the markets near churches. In that way, they encouraged people to buy something before or after they obligatorily visited the Church during Christmas time. The festive mood that people usually had during that time, increased their desire to buy and loosen up their wallets. The things that they bought or observed, did not only concern practical and daily objects, but also some new and special items. The marketplaces were filled with cakes, sweets, Christmas tree decorations and toys, benches and carousels, which children even to this day tend to find very attractive (Weber-Kellermann 1978, 70).

Consumerism activities during Christmas do not pass without being commented. Christmas markets are a new type of interaction that has become increasingly important in Germany since the 90s. *"Current types include tradition-based mega-markets with event character, markets in small- and medium- sized towns with varying degrees of commercialization, temporary Christmas bazaars and historicizing markets"* (Hirschfelder 2014, 1).

The public attention towards Christmas celebrations begins with the official opening of Christmas markets. Being present in a Christmas market, which is considered a very cheerful environment, surrounded by decorated Christmas trees, wooden cabins, joyful music, as well as the smell of foods, makes one considerably think about its loved ones. This thought often transforms to a desire to have them near. *“The Christmas season is wreathed in powerful themes that tug at people’s emotions—generosity, reconciliation, family, community spirit, connection with a treasured past, and so on—and clever minds have been quick to try to appropriate these meanings in their struggles for public attention. Commercial advertisers are, of course, the greatest force that muscles in on the season and turns it to their own ends”* (Bowler 2017, 154).

The transformation of society has played a role in altering Christmas markets as well. This is manifested by the fact that they are nowadays different from what they used to be earlier, in both functional and quantitative aspects. A related study made in the year 2011, shows that three million people have visited the Christmas market only in Munich, four million in Stuttgart, five million in Cologne and almost four million in Vienna. The actuality shows that the audience in these markets nowadays gets counted in millions and not in dozens or hundreds as it used to earlier (Hirschfelder 2014, 13).

Christmas markets have become a rapid installation for indoor as much as for outdoor markets. Nowadays, as consumerism increases, the staged and decorated cabins get installed in almost every indoor shopping mall. Materialism and economy *“appear here in a new dimension as factor that determines and creates culture. A clear symbolism is used by an interest group to make economic interests marketable. Tradition and regionality are constructed, and with the accelerated distribution by means of media and advertising a dissociation of the cultural pattern from the context follows and the perception as old”* (Hirschfelder 2014, 1).

1.3. Christmas gift-giving

The principle of *“ich gebe, damit Du mir gibst”*, described by ethnologist Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, which in English means; “I give you so that you give me”, lets us understand that the gift-giving ritual on Christmas should be a reciprocal practice. The celebration itself begins as people start exchanging gifts. In the modern industrial society, the ritual of gift-giving meets

the emotional relationships closer and extended family members have between them. Consequently, this may have a positive as well as a negative association. On one hand, people might be giving out of love and kindness. On the other hand, they might be also giving to compensate the lack of attention they didn't give to someone for the entire year (Weber-Kellermann 1978, 89).

The process of gift-buying is considered as the most stressful and tensioned activity regarding Christmas preparation. The gift-giving *"is the process which negates the previous existence of the thing as commodity"* (Miller 2017, 430).

The ritual of sending cards was a development of an earlier tradition of exchanging seasonal letters with greetings. By 1880, five million letters and cards were sent during Christmas time. The number hit its peak in the year 1991, numbering 122 million similar letters and cards that got sent (Searle-Chatterjee 1993, 176).

Nowadays, the ritual of sending cards is converted into online messages, such as emails, WhatsApp texts or other media. People choose online media to write and wish each other a Merry Christmas or send congratulations for other holidays. The practice of writing emails is much more practical and convenient.

Along the pre-Christmas rituals, people usually get stuck in crowded stores because of their common interests. Since everyone has a limited time to decide what presents to buy, this period is considered to be stressful. One of the most notable difficulties people encounter is deciding on what to buy for the parents, children, friends, aunties and uncles or grandparents. This custom of Christmas gift-giving has changed through the years. While books were established as proper gifts, nowadays toys and expensive gifts are requested as a symbol of pure pleasure. *"In effect this is the hard labor required for us to extract the thing as merely something in a shop and make it the exact right object that shows we have regard for the particular taste and character of the person we are buying the present for. As a gift it represents the long-term nature of our relationships, often those of kinship, which is why this is entirely an obligatory rather than voluntary process. We cannot fail to give our children or parents the presents expected of us"* (Miller 2017, 430).

The gifts given for Christmas remain material objects, usually commodities bought in crowded, garishly decorated stores, *“but it is also a vehicle of affection that expresses private sentiment within relationship that is personal and probably familial”* (Carrier 1993, 55)

Complaints about materialism, point out the fact that people pay too much attention to the material objects and too little to the sentiment and relationships. These complaints express the tension of the object that is given. The gift-giving process is more intense within the family than outside of it. Evidence taken from the sociologist Theodore Caplow explained the case of Middletown Christmas, where 90% of the families gave presents to their fathers, mothers, children and children’s spouses, regardless of whether they lived in the same town or not. For instance, children and parents exchanged gifts unequally in quantity and value (Carrier 1993, 56-57); (Caplow 1984, 1308-16).

While generally questioning the way people deal with the process of buying gifts within the family and outside it, Adrian Ryans (professor of marketing) (Ryans 1977) found a distinction between gifts bought for the family and relatives. The gifts bought for the family, were likely to require more time of searching for them. However, it was less likely for the family members to pre-discuss a fixed or approximate price up to which they were going to buy the gift. The gifts were usually chosen, so that they would fit to the needs and desires of the recipients. It wasn’t a must, for the members to reciprocate the gifts (Carrier 1993, 58).

Christmas shopping is usually done intensely and not just casually for one day. *“Christmas mobilizes almost the entire population for several weeks, accounts for about 4% of its total annual expenditure, and takes precedence over ordinary forms of work and leisure”* (Caplow 1984, 1306-7).

Has the gift-giving ritual of Christmas gotten out of hand? Carrier asked some questions regarding Christmas and the custom of gift-giving especially. These questions were evaluated as important and that they should be constantly asked. *“Why do Americans, even devout Christians spend so much effort in Christmas shopping? Why not give home-made gifts? Indeed, why give presents at all? Why not give a Christmas Card instead? It is true that the giving displays of affluence to a desire to shower a loved-one with lovely things. However, these more commonly recognized motives do not explain the intensity of Christmas shopping and people’s ambivalence toward it”* (Carrier 1993, 62).

Shopping is an integral part of Christmas. Christmas needs to be recognized in its socio-economic context, as much as it is recognized in its celebrational one. It is the key that proves to people that they can be around familial love in the face of a world of money (Carrier 1993, 63).

Even though children perceive Christmas as fun, they too, participate in symbolic giving. Each relationship must be embodied and manifested with at least one little gift. Gifts are also given to grandparents or to other family members on behalf of the children, babies. At school children partake in such rituals, and they *“are socialized into a conception of Christmas as a time for doing good deeds, for giving to the unfortunate, often to unknown members of society. This non-reciprocal giving symbolizes links with society as a whole in its widest extension. Teachers may expect children to visit elderly people with gifts”* (Searle-Chatterjee 1993, 183-184).

1.4. Christmas and family

The celebration of Christmas as a family occasion has its roots in England in the 19th century. Subsequently, it was soon familiarized and adopted across Europe, North America, and worldwide in the 20th century (Baumann 2004, 25).

For many people in England, the most important part of the day of Christmas is being with their families at their homes. From a study conducted in 1969, which contained questions about where and with whom they would spend Christmas day, results showed that 86% of the adults that responded would like to spend this day with their family. When asked, whether this day was an essential occasion for the family or more than that, a religious occasion, 53% responded that it was a family occasion, 9% said it was religious, and 37% said it was both. Christmas in England seems to be the only occasion where everyone deals with the same things at the same time. Being together meant that they had the seasonally habituated Christmas dinner, which was traditionally eaten by some families on Christmas Eve, or in the late afternoon by some other families. The main course of this dinner was roast beef, venison, chicken, goose or turkey. As a matter of fact, lately, almost everyone has the Christmas dinner in the early afternoon of Christmas day and almost everyone eats turkey (Kuper 1993, 157-158); (Pimlott 1978, 169).

Alongside Christmas preparations at home, comes this important element of preparing the specialties of foods or drinks, *“such as punch-a-crem (a potent mixture of over- proof rum, raw egg, and condensed milk), sorrel, ginger beer, black cake, and ham, as well as specially imported goods intimately associated with Christmas such as whiskey, apples, and grapes. Both the preparations of food or drink and the cleaning out of the house are intended to serve two demands. In the first instance, they provide the setting for the meal of Christmas Day, which is increasingly viewed as an intensely private celebration for the immediate family. This meal takes the best of the prepared edibles, including often three kinds of meat and the expensive imports and utilizes the home at its most pristine”* (Miller 2017, 421).

“Wenn man von Weihnachten spricht, dann erwacht für viele als erstes die Assoziation zu gutem Essen. Es riecht sogleich nach Gänsebraten und Pfefferkuchen”- (English: “when speaking of Christmas, the first association that arouses is good food. Straightaway it smells of roasted goose and pepper cake”) this is a citation from Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann’s book, written in the section that talks about traditional Christmas meals. The special meals and drinks are a part of every celebration. December is known as the hunting month, but the practice of hunting for Christmas meals begins even earlier, in November. This was the time when the less fortunate people who lived in villages, enjoyed their celebration and the winter joy. The 24th of December is known by Christians as a fasting day, therefore the enjoyable meal gave them double pleasure, as they came back from the Christmas midnight mass (Weber-Kellermann 1978, 166-169).

During the festive season of Christmas, it is important that the houses get the smell of such cakes, baked with special love and care. In that order, there is a diversity of the sorts that get baked. Those are then put to the colourful Christmas plates and are shared with hospitality and lavishness (Weber-Kellermann 1978, 170)

The experience one gets from celebrating Christmas is supposed to be a happy one. Christmas is clearly a family festival, whereby family is a centerpiece of this holiday. In England we can easily detect a few interesting practices manifested among it, which are specifically mentioned by social anthropologist Adam Kuper: *“In mid-December also, the carol singers do the rounds of a neighborhood, and in the week before Christmas there are low-key parties for neighbors and friends, in which children are included. Now is the time for the decoration of the home. Christmas cards are displayed. A Christmas tree is installed in the sitting room, often in a*

window. Towards Christmas -in some families only on Christmas Eve- the tree is dressed and its base strewn with wrapped presents. Christmas Eve itself is a quiet time, and the traditional moment of reverence at midnight may now be marked by attendance at a midnight mass. Presents are opened by the family in the morning. Privileged visitors may drop in. In early afternoon the family sits down to the Christmas dinner, which will include turkey, mince pies and Christmas pudding. Then after queen's speech they play games in which everyone can participate, and perhaps go for a walk, returning for a Christmas tea” (Kuper 1993, 165-166).

In many families, nostalgia can be a present feeling along the celebration. Through a remembrance of the days of the past, adults revive memories of their childhood Christmas insisting on small rituals which achieve to recall them. The same people gather at the same time of the year and sit in the same places as usual every year. The sociologist James Barnett points out that the practice of charity, kindness and family love during the Christmas period could be seen as an act of compensation for neglecting these moral obligations during the rest of the year and expressing it only within a day (Barnett 1954, 61-139); (Kuper 1993, 169-170).

Christmas is portrayed as an occasion that gets celebrated in the same order repeatedly every year and “*becomes the focal point for a sentimental and nostalgic view of the past centered upon the celebration of Christmas itself. In most such articles the family represents longevity and descent, the grandparents juxtaposed with the children, a sense of continuity with tradition being handed down through the generations*” (Miller 2017, 426).

The stability that a family has, will most commonly meet a few changes throughout the years, because of some inevitable cyclical happenings. Children leave home, marry and have their own children. Since this whole process requires their physical transfer from home, it might mean that their celebration of Christmas will also begin to take part in the new environments of their own homes and families. As we have discussed, Christmas must be spent with family. However, in this manner, we can add the question; whose family should we spend Christmas with? “*Where is the home base? Will the parents of both husband and wife attend the new family's Christmas?*” (Barnett 1954, 63); (Kuper 1993, 169-170); (Boholom 1983, 158).

The family tradition of celebrating Christmas comes together in different ways. Christmas changes in its form and meaning in the phases of life. Many questions raised over the years,

consist of where Christmas is to be celebrated and who is eligible to belong to the family. For many Swedish people, Christmas Eve has become the day in which the bilateral kinship system is put to its hardest test. Many families have been forced to develop new rituals and traditions to satisfy as much as possible not only one part of the family, such as maternal or paternal grandparents, but also the common-law part of the family. *“A middle-aged woman remembers how, as long as her parents lived, she firmly insisted that they should have the Christmas they were used to. But when they died and I was able to do what I wanted, well, it turned out that I didn’t want very much at all”* (Löfgren 1993, 226-227).

Gender role as a characteristic that takes place and is mostly discussed in the pre-Christmas period, is mentioned among many scholars. Even though Christmas day is marked as a free-work day, it is evaluated or even ascertained that women work harder on this day than ever. However, they don’t do it for money, but for love. The social anthropologist Pamela Shurmer wrote in 1971 that *“the preoccupation of women with gift-giving and hospitality ties in with their relationship to the wider economic system. In general, their importance is in a world of social, rather than business, relationships. They are associated with the subsistence sphere of the home, rather than with the cash sphere of the outside world”* (Shurmer 1971, 1244); (Kuper 1993, 171).

The idea of a perfect Christmas presupposes hard work on preparations, and women are the ones to mostly get pressured by it. Along with their shift at work, they do extra or double work at home. The hard work can really turn to being hectic and that is a common difficulty that almost every woman encounters during that period. As a result of that, they seem not to feel the Christmas sensation in their bodies the right way. Their dream of providing the perfect Christmas, also includes the desire to be the perfect housekeeper, wife and mother (Löfgren 1993, 232).

Daniel Miller argues that in the case of Trinidad, Christmas and Carnival preparations dominate a period of several months in advance. The period prior to Christmas is marked through some activities: shopping, cooking and cleaning the house. The housewives are also mentioned as the ones that deal the most with the preparation of Christmas activities. The effort and work are dominated by female members of the household. Therefore, most domestic duties are done by women. Men also have their own domestic responsibilities, such as house painting and chair

varnishing. Earlier, men used to go out with friends and drink their way from house to house on Christmas Eve. This practice has changed in the modern tradition of Christmas. Now, women are the ones to do it, since they are more inclined to go visiting and not merely be hosts as they used to be in the past (Miller 2017, 419-420).

During Christmas, people tendentiously overeat and overspend. Gentlemen usually decorate the house, while their wives prepare the Christmas Dinner. Beyond the Christmas duties, *“Christmas is also the dream of the good person and the happy family: a utopia of togetherness, generosity, warmth and caring”* (Löfgren 1993, 219).

November is perceived as a very long-lasting month for the children in Sweden. *“We can’t wait its last day because that’s when Daddy comes home with the Advent calendar”*. These lines are quoted by ethnologist Orvar Löfgren from the classic children’s book *‘Johan’s Christmas’*, written in 1940. Löfgren elaborates Christmas celebrations and preparations in a middle-class Stockholm home. The details mentioned are expected to be anticipated day by day until the magic day of Christmas comes. Every morning children are going to open a new window in the calendar; in Johan’s home this event is part of the family Christmas rituals, even though it is minor. In December, all the windows are opened one by one by the children according to their order of age. They learn how to be patient by waiting for their turn to slide a window in the calendar. This ritual holds the same expectations for Advent candles. *“Who will get to light the first of the four candles? When will it be lit? How long will it be allowed to burn?”* are just some of the questions raised regarding Christmas preparations (Löfgren 1993, 219-220).

There are many other rites, that should be done before the official ceremony of Christmas begins, such as *“the ceremonial cleaning, the baking, the cooking, practicing Lucia songs and Christmas carols, Christmas preparations at school, evening ruminations about what presents to wish for, what presents to buy, how to wrap them in secret, and so on”* (Löfgren 1993, 220).

During pre-holiday festivities, there are things that should be properly accomplished according to the related rituals and regulations of every detail: *“Then the moment arrives when you begin to panic at the thought that you won’t have time to finish everything so that it will be a proper Christmas. What it would be like without curtains, or with just half of the windows cleaned, and all the tablecloths removed, and the rugs rolled up and still to be beaten? And no Christmas*

presents ready! I haven't finished making the doily for Mother. I feel it in my bones that she will have a fit because it's too untidy and there's no Christmas atmosphere. Mother can feel things like that so well. She will think that her whole life is ruined, and Christmas too. I know that Father will try to keep the children's spirit up as far as possible, but deep inside he's sad. It shows in his eyes, as usual. He wants to give us children that Christmas peace that everyone preaches about at Christmas matins. In his childhood home there was peace both inside the house and in the barn from that moment on the day before Christmas Eve, when his father set up the Christmas sheaf for the birds in the tree outside the kitchen window. Then everything was ready. Even the birds knew that it was Christmas" (Löfgren 1993, 221-222).

Due to the Christmas celebration, there are some permitted and forbidden segments, which should be cautiously taken care of. Preparations are common to become demands. Every detail is important in order to have a perfect Christmas. In this phase, all the things that are considered to be crucial for providing the vivid and warm atmosphere of Christmas must be absolutely handled properly before the 24th of December comes. Taking care of every detail costs a considerable amount of energy and time. The pre-holiday rituals such as shopping and searching for a present for every member of the family and friends, is the most stressful thing to do. *Margareta Strömstedt* describes the nerve it takes to go through the preparation phase on Christmas, in the quotation above, taken from her novel "*Christmas Cleaning and Death*". Some requests of those rituals have been reduced and lowered in the recent decades, however other demands and expectations have only increased (Löfgren 1993, 222).

Christmas can be discussed as a confrontation between spiritual and material values. Maybe because the material one is displacing the spiritual one. Christmas celebrations try to achieve something authentic, genuine and proper. The success of Christmas and especially its embrace by modern commercialism has added doubts to this holiday. Some assume that Christmas has lost its authenticity or its authentic roots and soul by compromising with the commercial aspects of modernism (Miller 2017, 410). "*The irony is that on the one hand the folklorists constantly celebrate Christmas as a place where local character and authenticity is retained. On the other hand, they tend to be the most vociferous in their revulsion against recent commercial influences such as pop songs and films which they deem to be the main threat to these older folk varieties of Christmas*" (Miller 2017, 425).

For many individuals it is important to accomplish the duties by themselves, because this way they find Christmas more magical and valuable. Making the Christmas presents and wreath by yourself, picking the cowberry sprigs in a forest, rather than buying them, is valued as something very genuine and authentic. *“These normative and moral stances also mean that we devote great energy to our relation to other people’s celebrations. The concept of genuineness is not just a matter of what is home-made and saturated with tradition, but also of what constitutes a true Christmas spirit: some experiences are rich and full, while others seem superficial and empty”* (Löfgren 1993, 232).

Christmas is considered to be the only occasion within the year, that requests the participation of every member of the family. Being together with your family around decorated Christmas trees, wrapped-up Christmas presents, special drinks and seasonal Christmas dishes, indicates joyful and harmonious feelings. This agenda is the Christmas tradition itself and continues to be in motion: *“The processes of negotiating a change in Christmas customs are evidence of how cultural practices are constantly in motion, acquiring new meanings. In this case, it is an awareness that comes from the context of a multicultural society that triggers new conversations about the way ‘we’ have always celebrated Christmas”* (Scheer 2019, 30).

Researches that have provided statements on the different ways Christmas gets celebrated, have achieved to raise many conflicts in society. The tension of Christmas also brought tension in the research of Christmas itself. These celebrations were either judged as too little or too much. Two questions aroused within this statement; Is Christmas an instrument of oppression, that operates through disciplining the children and emotionally manipulating elders, adults into a false sense of communal harmony? Or is it all about money and material goods? (Belk 1993); (Scheer 2019, 20-21).

The final stage of approaching Christmas Eve, is the hanging of the curtains to signify the boundary between *“the inside world of domesticity and religion as against the outside world with its implications of transience and sin, is therefore a manifestly clear construction of the home as temple to the project of lineal family identity and descent, a theme echoed in the details of interior decoration, whether marriage photos or symbols of education such as encyclopedias* (Miller 2017, 435).

The practices and elements of this holiday demand a notable attention in a family, and even largely, in society as a whole. Since it is a habitual holiday, it is tendentiously the same every year for almost everyone. It seems like everyone takes advantage of the free as much as the ‘tensioned’ time, to be near their families, and to enjoy this tradition together, that is either adapted or practiced almost every year in the same way. During Christmas time, children are placed in the centerpiece at home, whereas the elders and adults play their role in making this day very special for them. In spite of all tensions and conflicts some groups (either in family or multicultural societies) might have between them, on Christmas, there is a great desire to work through them, to let these conflicts and tensions get aside, just to be able to celebrate together and be unified.

1.5. Christmas tree and other decorations

The earliest evidence of a Christmas tree was spotted in urban handicrafts from the traditional customs of the guilds, and not in indoor environments as they are usually seen now. In 1570 a German chronicle from Bremen, wrote about a “date tree”, which was a fir tree filled with apples, nuts, dates, pretzels and paper flowers, placed in a guild house. The tree would be shaken off by the children later on Christmas Eve. Later, in the second half of the 16th century, the protestant guilds organized their new Christmas celebrations, and they carried the Christmas tree from the guild rooms, into their domestic private sphere, i.e. to their families. The Christmas tree became known throughout Europe by the 18th century, and later, in the 19th century, it was spread in America and other overseas areas as well. It is important to mention that the Christmas tree was primarily a part of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie families in Germany and in other countries where the ritual was cultivated, from 1850 to 1870 (Weber-Kellermann 1978, 107-110).

Cary Nathenson explored the story of a girl from the south side of Chicago, who really wanted a Christmas tree. She passed this one and only request to her mother. Given the circumstances, her request was complicated, since the girl, like most of her neighbors, was Jewish. Anyways, her mother bought her the Christmas tree. The tree was smuggled down the alley into the apartment, lest the neighbors get the wind of shame. The girl was very happy and enjoyed the accompaniment of the tree, while celebrating Hanukkah. One day she suddenly got sick, and

the tree had to be rapidly stuffed into a closet before the paediatrician arrived. *“The stress of this secret Christmas was ultimately too much bother, so this would be my mother’s one and only “Chrismukkah” celebration. Of course, she didn’t know to call it that, nor did she know that craving a Christmas tree placed her on a historical continuum with her German-Jewish ancestors, some of whom might have celebrated the hybrid holiday called “Weihnukka” (from Weihnachten, German for “Christmas.”) Weihnukka was not an actual holiday but referred instead to the practice of some assimilated—but not converted—Jews who adopted Christmas rituals in the private sphere. In some German-Jewish bourgeois homes of the Wilhelmine era, trees, Advent calendars, wreaths and other, mostly superficial trappings of the holiday co-existed, if not usurped, the rituals of Judaism’s winter holiday, Hanukkah”* (Nathenson 2013, 57).

Germans in general wanted to belong to the holiday, regardless of their religious beliefs. Some German-Jews on the other side, felt embarrassed and ashamed to introduce Christmas into their families (Nathenson 2013, 57).

There have always existed tensions between the spiritual and material, religious and cultural matters, whereas these transformations have gotten our attention. Christmas is not only entering places in which multiple religious identities are situated, but in interfaith families as well. *“More research on the perspective of how non-Christian or mixed-faith Germans experience the holiday can show how not only tensions and discontents but also pleasures and playfulness can emerge from this constellation. As the co-presence of multiple religious and holiday traditions incite new forms of celebration, commemoration, decoration, and consumption, Christmas appears -in public as well as scholarly discourse- to heighten the significance of ‘religion’ as a force to be dealt with in the public sphere, with paradoxical effects. On the one hand, religion is subsumed under concepts such as culture, nation, heritage, or memory, and on the other these concepts are in the process made equivalent to religion”* (Scheer 2019, 30).

“Although Christmas is not generally a religious occasion, it involves much ritualized behavior. It is a ritual in the sense that it consists of widely shared and predictable routines, is a time of heightened emotion, focused on culturally prescribed activities that idealize and sanctify a key social institution, the three- generational family and its social networks. There are strong pressures on people to conform. Things must be done ‘properly’ and be ‘special’. They are expected to drink alcohol, a key symbol both of ‘communion’ and of ‘specialness’ of

the season. Those who refuse to 'become pissed' or to 'lark about' whether in the home, office (in pre-Christmas parties), or elsewhere, are 'spoilsports' who are refusing to recognize 'specialness' or sacredness, and refusing to participate in group communion" (Searle-Chatterjee 1993, 182).

Christmas may not be Christian, but so far it is sacred as much as it can be profaned by commerce. Christmas couldn't be perceived as a religious occasion but as a ritualized behavior. The holiday consists of widely shared routines and focuses on rituals that are compatible. Those who resist or refuse to be part of such celebrations, may be considered as those who are refusing to participate in a wide group communion (Searle-Chatterjee 1993, 182).

The following section discusses Islam and its relation to Christmas by stating some opinions, which elaborate interesting facts about celebrating and not celebrating Christmas as a Muslim.

1.6. Islam and its relation to Christmas

Christmas is a global holiday that gets celebrated not only by Christians. This can be proved by the fact that people from all over the world participate in this festivity. An interesting example is mentioned by Khan et. al., when they talk about the American Muslim Ani Zonneveld, that hosted Christmas parties, sang Christmas carols, cooked traditional food, decorated Christmas trees and partook in the custom of gift-giving. This gives an illustration of how religious minorities engage with other religious and culturally dominant social groups. This behavior has been analysed and explained from Amna Khan, Andrew Lindridge, Theeranuch Pusaksrikit and Lisa Penaloza from Business school, as a cultural acculturation, describing *"the acquisitions of skills and knowledge relevant to engaging in consumer behavior in one culture by members of another culture"* (Khan, Lindridge and Pusaksrikit 2018, 290); (Penaloza 1989, 110).

The term *'acculturation'* used in the description above, clarifies how individuals reject, compromise or submerge themselves in the behavior of others. The previous *"consumer acculturation research has shown how minorities cope, negotiate and adjust to society's wider social and cultural context"* (Laroche und Jamal 2015, cited from Khan, Lindridge, & Pusaksrikit, 2018, 290).

"Islam" means "peaceful submission to the will of God" and the Quran and Sunnah, describe a comprehensive collection of moral guidelines that include personal, political, religious, and social life. Along with Judaism and Christianity, Islam is an Abrahamic religion that was exposed to the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century CE in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Christianity and Islam share similar theological convictions. They are monotheistic, highly respected by the same leading figures, and worship the same God. Islam recognizes Jesus Christ and rules him as one of the most important prophets - Prophet Isa. However, Islam rejects Jesus Christ as the Son of God, his subsequent execution and rebirth (Ruth 2015); (Khan, Lindridge and Pusaksrikit 2018, 292).

Within Islam, like within other religions, there are some interpretations, which can be perceived as both conservative and liberal. Conservative opinions encourage the objectivity of western ideals. In contrary, the liberal interpretation of Islam encourages greater cooperation between Muslims and other religions in a wider society (Nasr 1996); (Taylor 2009).

"As Islam recognizes Christianity, how then does it relate to and understand the Christian celebration of Christmas? This question raises three issues. First, how does Islam view celebrations, second, how does Islam view Christmas, and how does Islam view Muslims engagement with Christmas? Ultimately, the answers to these questions lie within the Quran and Sunnah, and Islamic conservative and liberal perspectives" (Khan, Lindridge and Pusaksrikit 2018, 292).

The celebration of Christmas from groups that are party of the Islam society, is considered very complex. This celebration is marked through some activities that make this day important and special by transmitting the aim of social gatherings and engagement. Islam has two traditional celebrations; the so-called *Eid ul Fitr*, and *Eid ul Adha*. Both are traditionally accompanied by family gatherings, serving and consuming food, pre-cleaning the house, visiting relatives etc. Many keep questioning whether Muslims should or shouldn't celebrate not only Jesus Christ's birthday but also the Prophet Mohammad's. Conservative Islamic groups think that neither Jesus Christ's nor Prophet Mohammad's birthday should be celebrated. On the other hand, some liberal Islamic groups think that *"celebrating Prophet Mohammad's birthday is acceptable as a means of affirming their Islamic beliefs"* (Abdul-Rahman 2003); (Khan, Lindridge and Pusaksrikit 2018, 292).

How does Islam perceive Christmas? Regarding this topic, some reviews of Muslim websites reveal conflicting opinions, such as the fact that Muslims do not celebrate any of the Islamic prophet's birthdays (Islam-Question-Answer 2012). The president of the Islamic religious community in Austria, Ümit Vural, wishes all the best for Christmas to Christians via his Facebook page,: „*Auch wenn wir Muslime Weihnachten nicht feiern, so ist uns das Fest des Friedens ein willkommener Anlass, um für Frieden und Zusammenhalt einzustehen. In diesem Sinne ein besinnliches Fest*“ (Eng. “Even if we as Muslims do not celebrate Christmas, this festivity of peace is a welcomed occasion for us, to stand up for harmony and solidarity. In this sense, we wish you a contemplative holiday” (Vural, Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich, 2018).

However, some other websites state that it is acceptable to commemorate Prophet Isa on Christmas, without relating it to his birth (Leghaei 2014).

Since Muslims have such different approaches and perspectives on whether Christmas should or should not be celebrated, and since some of them reject the celebration of Jesus Christ's birth (or as they call him, Prophet Isa) it is interesting to capture an insight of how they engage in a society that actually celebrates this holiday. “*When we approach the diverse ways in which holidays are celebrated or not celebrated, different connections manifest and we discover that there are no clear-cut lines as to how to incorporate Christmas and other traditions into family life*” (Reimers 2019, 168).

In this case, we should respectively focus on two perspectives of Islam; Firstly, the conservative perspective, which basically prohibits Muslims to celebrate Christmas, considering otherwise every ritual done within this celebration as haram¹, and as an imitation of kuffaar² (Islam-Question-Answer 2012); (Khan, Lindridge and Pusaksrikit 2018, 292);

Moreover, it is also not permissible to put up any element or do any activity that symbolizes Christmas. These elements and activities can simply be the Christmas tree, decorating or adornment, cooking special foods, parties, gift-exchanging, time off work, etc. (Islam-

¹ Haram, any act that is forbidden by Allah (by Islamic law)

² Kuffaar, an arabic term meaning infidel, rejector and unbeliever or non-Muslim

Question-Answer 2012). *“When you call it a Christmas tree, that’s a celebration of Christmas, which is a Christian holiday”* (Bowler 2017, 235).

Mohammad once said: *“He who is practicing the way and the belief of unbelievers is not part of my people. Do not celebrate; fear Allah”* (Bowler 2017, 149). Therefore, this statement confirms that such activities will be considered an imitation (*kuffaar*), which is undoubtedly banned (*haram*) in Islam.

Secondly, the liberal perspective, which supports the idea that Christmas celebration is not a sin as long as drinking, inappropriate music, dancing, or similar activities are not performed. (Leghaei 2014); (Khan, Lindridge and Pusaksrikit 2018, 292).

It is also mentioned that the greeting wish ‘Merry Christmas’ from or to non-Muslims is permissible, only if it doesn’t in any way glorify their religion (The-Strait-Times 2016). *“When you are greeted with a greeting, greet in return what is better than it, or (at least) return equally”*, this part is taken from Surah 4, Ayah 86 (Leghaei 2014).

Gerry Bowler (department of religion and popular culture), on the other hand gave an interesting opinion about the birth celebration of the Child Christ, which for Muslims is considered incorrect and objectionable: *“Though both Islam and Christianity revere the figure of Jesus, Christmas is the celebration of the birth of the Son of God, a claim Muslims find incorrect and objectionable”* (Bowler 2017, 148).

Many Muslim communities are against the Christmas celebration, because they think it is *“the fear that Muslims will participate in it, either because it is part of the surrounding culture or because it represents an attractive element of a globalizing West”* (Bowler 2017, 148).

Gerry Bowler mentioned some initiatives taken by Imams from different countries with Muslim minorities, who raised their voice to express what activities are against Islam and what shouldn’t occur during Christmas. For instance, Imam Suleiman of the Turkish town of Kuzan found it suspicious that Santa Claus brought presents by climbing down chimneys. He said: *“If he was an honest person he would come through the door as we do”* (Bowler 2017, 149).

How do we determine Christmas? As an interpretation of religion, culture, materialism or market event? The term Christmas associates and represents the birth of Jesus Christ. However, the Bible does not say that Jesus Christ’s birthday must be celebrated. All of the other religious

Christmas celebrations reflect religion as cultural symbolism (Geertz 1966, cited from A.Khan et al, p.292-293).

Sophie Reimers (department of cultural history) has given us some examples of Muslim families along with their understanding and perception of their engagement and relation to Christmas celebrations. As she was doing her research with an immigrant family in Germany, she encountered confusion indicated to Christmas and *“how Christmas was connected to a wider array of questions involving issues of belonging and integration”* (Reimers 2019, 161-162).

Hence, she put her focus on the Muslim Turkish-German families and formulated her research by some broad questions related to the daily life in a multicultural city and family (Reimers 2019, 162).

The statement that Christmas is entirely global, would not entirely stand, since not every country or social community celebrates it. As we have gone through the perceptions of both conservative and liberal perspectives, we may now understand that there are some countries that eschew the celebration of Christmas in order to reinforce their sense of distinct identity. Many countries approach Christmas as a non-religious holiday, in the sense of a global festival. In this case, there may be no particular affinity with the family, as it is noticed in the European tradition of Christmas. Therefore, the festival may adopt whatever setting seems appropriate or works for a particular country. It does not necessarily mean that Christmas’s baggage of a particular symbolism will appear along with its approach. *“It may not be related either to Christianity or the family. Instead it serves to mark a bridge between participation in something clearly recognized as global, with some specific aspect of that regional tradition that retains some sense of the particular and the distinct”* (Miller 2017, 423-424).

2. Religious and cultural dimensions of Christmas celebrations

Since this paper started with a brief discussion of the origin and purpose of Christmas, I believe it gave us a closer insight and introduction to Christmas's religious and cultural meaning. As we may have noticed, the idea that Christmas derived from three Roman festivals in the fourth century, the Kalends, Saturnalia and Dies Natalis Solis Invicti, is quite arguable. Among the characteristics of Christians, stands the element of devotion to the family, symbolized by the infant Jesus in the crib next to Joseph and Mary. Miller argues that this foundation remains significant in understanding Christmas through its history until the twenty-first century. Today, contemporary Christmas stands for family togetherness and is seen as a powerful global festival, which in some countries gets celebrated unescorted by another festival, and in some others, gets retained by twin-peaked structures, based on some other festivals (Miller 2017, 436).

I have intended to outline some important topics that brought us here to the main chapter of this study and close to the findings of my own empirical research. Within this paper, some important questions as well as some characteristics throughout Christmas celebrations by Christians and non-Christians got raised and lightened up: What is the purpose of Christmas? What kinds of rituals occur during this holiday? What elements are required to accomplish the celebration of Christmas? Who celebrates Christmas? Why is Christmas known as the most popular festival worldwide?

As I have given some examples in the chapters above, Christmas nowadays is seen as a family occasion by many non-Christians worldwide (Jews, Muslims etc.). Its celebration takes an important place in their life and is hardly avoidable for most of them. Knowing that Christmas celebrations mostly took place in western countries, it is important to explicate the opinions Muslims have regarding this topic: How does Islam see the celebration of the birth of Christ Child? What kind of opinions do the conservatives and liberals have? Does Islam allow the celebration of this festival?

Christmas is the most massive, widespread event in the world, being the only one that affects such an enormous number of people on the planet. I found this phenomenon interesting, and

therefore began researching and exploring it further, in order to understand the impact, the holiday has on the Albanian Muslims in Vienna: Do they celebrate Christmas? What and why exactly do they celebrate? What do they consider important or not within Christmas celebration? What kind of mixture and seasonal habitus do they engage in and practice in their families? What association calls up the word Christmas for them? Is there any Christmas tradition that is familiar from Kosovo?

2.1. Findings

As it has already been mentioned above, this paper addresses the question of how Albanian Muslims engage themselves with Christmas celebrations. Therefore, three interviews have been conducted (two of them were families - one with two children (Berisha family), one with three children (Gashi family) and one as a single person (Vesa)).

Within the interviews, it was easily detectable that the participants shared different thoughts on concepts regarding what, why, and how things should be done on Christmas. The topic of Christmas celebrations brought up many pages of transcripts of the formal and informal discussions held during the Christmas season of 2019. It was very astonishing to get to learn about all the practices that they do during the Christmas season. For example, the practice of photo shooting was very surprising, and a very important tradition for the Berisha family, especially for Mrs. Berisha. During the informal conversations where I asked the participants whether they would agree to be part of my research and as we were trying to schedule the interviews, I gathered some information, like their involvement, as well as their participation in Christmas parties at their children's school or kindergarten.

After transcribing all the interviews in Albanian, I selected the relevant passages that were important for the analysis and translated them into English. I then undertook open and axial coding for the selected passages to further develop my own interpretation and to come closer to the core themes of my work. I compared the coding and interpretations to allow the exploration of similarities and differences to better understand the data.

I moved between literature and data and between some parts of the transcript, i.e. passages and the whole material which led me to five main themes: a) *Christmas: cultural or religious?*; b) *Adapting or Negotiating Christmas rituals*; c) *Christmas as a twin-peaked festival and its associations with New Year's*; d) *Consumerism, Europeanization and Christmas Affordances*; e) *Atmosphere in public and private domestic spheres*.

Consequently, in the following section of my study, I discuss the selected passages from the interviews, which are relevant for the further analysis. These examples illustrate how Christmas is seen from a non-Christian perspective.

Firstly, in the section of "*Christmas: cultural or religious?*", I will explore how the participants of this study, precisely the Muslim Albanians, involve with religious and cultural events during Christmas celebrations. Throughout this section, the participants answered the important questions about their migration background and experiences on this holiday. answered.

The second theme is "*Adapting or Negotiating Christmas*" in which the participants explain their involvement and adaptation, or negotiation with Christmas rituals, but also how they distance themselves from them. To get a clearer picture, I have created some subcategories: "Past experiences with Christmas rituals", "Christmas dishes", "Christmas tree rituals", "Family visiting rituals", "Gift-giving ritual", "Photo rituals", "Christmas movies", "Advent calendar rituals" and "Other rituals".

The third theme stands for, "*Christmas as a twin-peaked festival and its associations with New Year's*". In this part, the participants give an overview and explain how they connote Christmas celebrations with New Year's, and how generally in Kosovo, the celebration of Christmas appears as a twin-peaked festival with New Year's.

The fourth section, "*Consumerism, Europeanization and Christmas Affordances*", explains the concepts of materialism and consumerism, which were also brought up by the participants.

The final theme, "*Atmosphere in public and private domestic spheres*", illustrates the experiences and traditional practices that the participants take part in or are engaged with. Christmas time could be seen as the most stressful time of the year, which is why I named the subcategory, in which the participants share their experiences, "Stressful activities", followed by "Winter and Christmas atmosphere" and "December activities".

a) Christmas: cultural or religious?

At the beginning of this study, I tried to give an overview of the meaning of Christmas and its relations to Christianity as well as to Islam. Every participant of the study described their religious attitude and behavior at the beginning of the interview. Whilst all of them are Albanian and Muslim, they still consider themselves engaged or involved with this holiday in one way or another. This is a result of their migration experiences, their children's preferences, and their daily life engagement in western society. As a matter of fact, some of them struggled to discuss their engagement with Christmas or even partake in my study, because of their concern that their opinions might be a misinterpretation of their Islamic belief.

As a starting point of the interview, the first answer of the very first question (How do you celebrate Christmas, and what is important and less important during this time for you and your family?), was formulated almost by all participants this way: Christmas has no significance for us and we don't celebrate it, because our beliefs belong to the Muslim religion, thus this holiday has nothing in common with our traditions. This formulation was similar in the answers of the children of the Gashi family too, not only during the interview, but also from some earlier observations, as well as some discussions that I had with them.

Only when I directly asked them something, they naturally spoke in the first-person perspective. Otherwise they tended to speak in the third-person perspective in order to represent the general opinion of their whole family.

Mr. Berisha: No, **we don't celebrate Christmas**, but children for example, usually participate in events that are organized from schools. In such events they are never separated from their classmates. As non-Christians, we do not celebrate it, because it has nothing in common with our Muslim religious tradition. However, we visit Christmas markets, for example the Christmas market by the "Rathaus" (city hall), and we take photos there. It is interesting for the children and for us as well, seeing those lights, and the decorations of the city. We also tend to visit some of our Christian friends. Consequently, as a family that lives here, we don't do anything more special than this.

[...]

Liza: I like the Christmas time, but I do not celebrate it. I like it when Vienna is decorated with lights, because it looks very beautiful at night. However, for me, as a non-celebrant, that is not so important.

Bubuline: And why don't you celebrate it?

Liza: Because I'm Muslim. We go out to see the city, enjoy the way it is decorated for Christmas, but we do not celebrate Christmas.

Right after the 11-year-old girl answered, her father added a comment of what the girl had just pointed out. I found it interesting, how her opinion got further articulated and finished by someone else rather than her.

Mr. Gashi: No, we just participate in enjoying the view. We love the city decorations, as well as the Christmas markets. Therefore, we do take advantage to be there, to take pictures, to eat and drink something. But, since we are not Christians, we don't entirely participate in that celebration like Christians do, and we don't perceive it as a religious Holiday, for example to go to church to pray, or buy a gift, or bake a cake or biscuits. No, because we have a different orientation, in terms of beliefs. But this doesn't bother us, because we are living in this country. As I said earlier, we partake just visually [outdoors] observing, looking, following, but not participating within the organization of the celebration of the holiday.

The interpretation of their religiosity can be evaluated in two different directions. The first direction comes from the answer of the Berisha family and Vesa, through which the interviewed declare themselves as Muslim, but do not partake in the Islamic rituals, as well as their children who haven't confessed their religion yet. The other direction comes from the answer of the Gashi family, through which the parents and their children declare themselves as Muslim, but unlike the Berisha family and Vesa, they do follow religious Islam traditions and rituals such as praying, fasting during Ramadan and celebrating Eid.

Accordingly, the Berisha family and Vesa engage willingly to the western rituals and traditions, such as purchasing gifts, decorating the tree, drinking alcohol, participating at a Christmas party and having a Christmas dinner on Christmas Eve. Even if they don't accomplish these rituals properly, they are still an expression of willing to participate in and engage with Christmas. By

partaking in this event, they accept its cultural and commercial symbolism, but they avoid its religious symbolism.

Mr. Berisha: Normally, Christmas has no special significance for us. This is due to the fact that we are not a Catholic family, we are a Muslim family. However, because of the children and because of the place we currently live in, we try to give Christmas a meaning by celebrating it as a family holiday. We decorate the house with things that represent the Christmas atmosphere; we go out to the “Weihnachtsmärkte” until Christmas day. While Christmas Eve is not of much importance, we usually visit Catholic relatives on this day. So, this is basically how we spend Christmas holidays. I mean, we don't have a very specific reason to celebrate it, but it has generally started to become a part of our daily life.

[...]

Vesa: Well, Christmas is not a holiday that I celebrate as something religious, but normally, because of the atmosphere that gets created in the city where I live in, Vienna, I like to be part of it, but not because of my belief, or something. But obviously when you see other people, being so close to each other, you for sure experience the feeling or need to spend those days in the same way as they do. I cannot be with my family, because I live far from them, but at least I try to be close to relatives who live here, if they are free and I am free as well, I try to spend these days with them.

It is also noticeable that within the family members of the Berisha family, the scale of significance on Christmas celebration can vary from a member to another. Mrs. Berisha points out the phenomenon of reciprocal adaptation to different religious holidays. For instance, since her brother-in-law tries to adapt his behavior to Muslim holidays, reciprocally she respects Christmas more than before because of him.

Mrs. Berisha: And for me there is a reason to celebrate Christmas. This is because of my brother in law (my sister's husband), who is Catholic. Even when we have our Muslim holidays, he always tries to adapt to us. He visits during our holidays; he celebrates our Muslim holidays and therefore we spend Christmas Eve with my sister's husband and my sister. So, Christmas has become more valuable to us since the day he joined our family. Christmas had no meaning before we knew him. But it does now, to me personally at least.

Children are the driving force and defining audience of the traditions and characteristic elements of Christmas. Because of the children, the participants adapt to a seasonal

consumption that is an essential part of the holiday, as well as a desire to try something new. For the Berisha family, Christmas itself isn't the main reason why they celebrate. The family wants to just give the children the feeling of belonging and fitting to the rest of the school, class and friends. They want to help their children socialize, and that is why they participate willingly each year in celebration, just like everyone else does.

Mr. Berisha: Maybe it will seem more important to them [children] as they start meeting other children and asking each-other about the end of year holidays, the presents they'd gotten, or places they'd been to. This is also the main reason why we never try to stop or get away from these things, even though they don't really mean much to us. We believe that children should feel equal in school, no matter what religion they belong to. I've seen how Austrians deal with this holiday, how they see it more as a family occasion rather than as a religious one, even though it is religious. I haven't seen or heard someone say that: 'I don't celebrate Christmas, because I am atheist', or 'I believe something else'. Although a lot of Austrians are registered as atheists, they still celebrate Christmas. Thus, **I see no reason** why we shouldn't celebrate Christmas!

Mrs. Berisha: I believe that one day this holiday will be more important for our son, our children, than it is for us now, because they will grow with this holiday. They celebrate it in kindergarten, in school, and at home.

Mr. Berisha pointed out at the beginning of the interview that "we don't have a very specific reason to celebrate it, but it has generally started to become a part of our life". As a matter of fact, the same person also mentioned a few minutes later that "I see no reason why we shouldn't celebrate Christmas!" The ambivalence of such opinions was present in the other participants as well. They seemed to struggle when it came to declaring themselves as celebrants, which they later on throughout the conversation, still mentioned and accepted.

In contrast, the Gashi family articulated the response declaring that this is not something their children are bonded with. According to their opinion, children have absolutely no interest in knowing why they don't celebrate Christmas, nor why they don't decorate a tree, and they don't even bother to ask about it. Nevertheless, they keep asking and requesting on having the day off from school on Eid.

Mrs. Gashi: It is very interesting that our children never asked us anything about Christmas. They have just never paid attention to the fact that we do not celebrate Christmas, I don't know

why. They have never asked this question. [...] For Eid, they insist on having the day off school and they are allowed for their holidays to have a day off.

Mr. Gashi: They know when Ramadan comes, because of the change our daily routine meets. We eat on a different schedule, so they notice that. The children at school also talk to each-other about religion sometimes. There are some other Muslims in our son's class, they aren't Albanians though. Our son knows a bit about religion, because he attends religion lessons in school once a week.

Mr. Gashi has a university degree on Islamic Theology, which clearly reflects the way this family accomplishes Christmas and the Muslim holidays. As we can notice, the participants' present perspectives are in a way shaped from their past experiences such as their immigration or their educational background. The members of the Gashi family are obviously more bonded to the Islamic holidays such as Ramadan and Eid, as they are with Christmas, although they don't reject or disrespect people who do celebrate it.

They are open-minded and consider themselves as liberals, who are not too devoted to their religion. They support the idea that Christmas is not a sin, as long as drinking and similar activities don't get performed. They try to integrate themselves in a wider society and that's a reason why they willingly participate in some of the activities related to Christmas.

Mr. Gashi: Usually, the children discuss this topic in school after the holidays. Their teacher asks them about the way they spent their holidays, where they'd been and some other similar questions. It's the same in every school here. However, our children have never expressed any keen interest in this topic, nor have they asked us why we don't celebrate Christmas, or why we don't decorate the tree, even though the tree is very interesting for children, and even in Kosovo the tree is like a tradition. I don't know, it is not because we are so religious, Muslims, or that we are so much devoted to our religion that we go that far to limit or forbid things. That doesn't stand as a reason, because we are liberal, in a way. We respect our religion, but we are not closed-minded. We are open to other societies, to other religions, and we don't have any problem with that. We try to integrate ourselves in society, as it should be. As for the children, perhaps they understood it from my profession [teacher of the Islamic religion] and maybe because this tradition is not even familiar to them since it never existed in our house. So that might be the reason they never insisted on doing something such as the tree decoration or gift-giving. It never happened.

It's quite obvious that the way the children behave related to this holiday, depends on one hand, on the way the parents nurture and teach their children to behave according to their culture and religious beliefs, and on the other, on the way parents engage themselves to this holiday. Their religious socialization varies from their parental socialization into the Austrian culture. For almost each of them, this holiday occurs not just as a Christian event, but as a western cultural event too. Another factor in celebrating Christmas is the children's school. At some schools there are some assemblies, from which the students get to learn more about Christmas. In some cases, they also learn Christmas songs and sing them at home. Singing along or participating in such festive days, occurs in some way to emphasize their will to be integrated and accepted from the majority social groups.

Mr. Berisha: When our son is going to be able to understand what Christmas is, of course that I am going to explain to him what I believe in and what religion I belong to. However, I won't impose on him to believe or feel the same way as I do. Also, if he is wondering why we celebrate it and somebody else doesn't, I will of course explain it to him. We are planning on explaining it to him in the future, we don't know what is going to happen until then (laughs).

We can spot a certain insecurity while the interviewed speak of the Advent time, festival names or the events at school or in kindergarten. Regardless, they want their children to be part of those events, and to experience nothing less than all Christian families they are surrounded by do. Although they might fail to address the religious meaning of Christmas. This is noticed by the fact that they don't for once mention visiting a church, explaining to their children the part of Jesus Christ's birth, or doing anything else religious in that matter.

Discussion on whether they participated in the "Laternen" or "Nikolo"-festival:

Mrs. Berisha: It was Laternen, because the kindergarten does not want parents to be part of its indoor celebrations with the children, and Nikolo and the Christmas party was organized within the kindergarten. It begins with the Laternen Festival... [...] Nothing from us is required from kindergarten. Kindergartens in Vienna have forbidden the parents to bring something with them, because they prepare everything by themselves.

[...]

Mr. Gashi: Noticeable activities are especially organized by schools. Every Sunday takes place that one...what do you call it? First, second Advent?

As ethnologist Hermann Bausinger mentioned, in areas where one religion dominates, children who belong to other religions rather than the dominant one, unavoidably learn about it through their schools, kindergartens or other educational institutions. There are different interactions with this particular holiday, but as we can see, “religion” doesn’t play a huge role for the participants, nor is it mentioned by them. Besides they understand their desires and they respond when they are needed to do something, as is the case of school activities (Bausinger 2019, 269).

b) Christmas as a twin-peaked festival and its associations with New Year’s

Generally, in Albanian speaking countries, and in Albanian families which immigrated to Vienna, Christmas retains a twin peaked structure bonded with the New Year’s celebration. Many Albanians combine and mix elements that are seen as typically and traditionally Christmassy and transfer their context to New Year’s Day. Their celebrations associate more with New Year’s rather than with Christmas.

Mrs. Gashi: If you happen to ask someone in Kosovo why this tree is decorated, they all say because of New Year’s, nobody says it is for Christmas, even though the tree has Christmas symbolism. Until the end of New Year’s Eve, you have this atmosphere, and here [in Vienna] you can notice, that after Christmas Eve, it has almost no meaning.

It is obvious that other holidays such as New Year’s Eve occur around the Christmas period. They are also notably highlighted by all participants. In this sense, this may be a justification for their behavior towards the Islam religion. Celebrating Christmas might make them feel like they have crossed some religious laws and lines, consequently they may fear that their actions aren’t accordingly right within their religion. For instance, they tend to link every Christmas detail or symbolic element with the New Year’s feast rather than with the Christmas celebration itself.

As I have already mentioned above, Muslims celebrate two important holidays; Eid ul ni Fitr, and Eid ul Adha. New Year’s Eve is not mentioned as a holiday that should be celebrated. Also, from their religious perspective, any activity related to Christmas is considered banned (haram) (Bowler 2017, 149).

Mr. Gashi: Well, I don't know what to say about the holiday. The celebration of Christmas doesn't give us any special feeling. For us, this is derived from the New Year's celebration, or the so-called End of Year celebrations. New Year's remains a symbol, which is celebrated in the family. Somebody would decorate the Christmas tree, mostly because of the children. Lately, it is more common that we are not at home during the holidays. We are either in Kosovo or in Switzerland with my brothers, so we don't have the time to decorate the tree. However, on New Year's Eve, it depends where we're at, but we follow the same rituals, such as; get something to drink, eat, and watch TV. That is what it's called, a symbolic celebration of New Year's Eve, for us Muslims. As for Christmas, it is not something we give that much attention to. I can't think of anything special that we do on such celebrations right now.

In Kosovo, Christmas is remarkably connected to the New Year's celebration. This kind of tradition is also linked to people who immigrated to western countries, as it is the case with these particular participants of this study. Daniel Miller mentioned that in the Soviet Union, Christmas was abolished but, in that order, Lenin created the New Year's celebration. Due to this occasion they included decorating and lighting up a tree, giving presents to children, sending out cards and so on (Miller 2017, 425). Mr. Gashi pointed out an interesting information on how during communism, former Yugoslavia celebrated only New Year's, but right after democratization, the term "Holiday" got its plural "Holidays", which included Christmas celebrations.

Mr. Gashi: The name of the tree connotes Christmas, but for Albanians in Kosovo it connotes more New Year's than Christmas itself. Earlier, before the democratization of former Yugoslavia, in communism they only celebrated the New Year's holiday, because religion was forbidden by law. New Year's was like the biggest holiday celebrated during the year. The holiday was celebrated by all nationalities who lived in Yugoslavia and generally in the block of eastern countries, the communist countries like the Balkans, Russia and China. And so, this tradition has continued to this day. But now, after the democratization, especially in the 90s, the word holiday got its plural holidays. Earlier the singular was used to refer to New Year's as a single holiday, but now we call it End-Year holidays, which means that we have added Christmas holidays into it. [...] Since then, this holiday has continued to focus more on New Year's celebrations than on Christmas. This is also due to the fact that in Kosovo the majority of the people has Muslim beliefs. For us, it is like a tradition to celebrate New Year's. The tree is considered to be a symbol of New Year's more than a symbol of Christmas, except to the

Christians who live in Kosovo, which is four to five percent. It is evident that this tradition got passed to the Albanians who immigrated to western countries. They show it by usually organizing various concerts, where all the Albanian diaspora gathers together in one place to celebrate.

It looks like the Gashi family and Vesa tend to be more related to the rituals of New Year's. They took some examples on how they celebrate New Year's in Kosovo, and they described the atmosphere that exists during that time. They mentioned that for the last four to five years, there is a tradition to build wooden, decorated cabins and decorating the tree.

Mrs. Gashi: It's called Vere n'Dimen [which has two meanings: Vere like Wine in Winter, and Summer in Winter]. The wooden cabins are beautifully decorated, as well as the Christmas tree, which by the way is bigger than in Vienna. Every night they play live music there... [...] In Kosovo, the tree gets mostly decorated because of the New Year's holiday. And even the children get off school one day before New Year's Eve.

[...]

Mr. Gashi: After the 25th you have nothing here. The wooden cabins, trees, and basically everything else is removed, because they respect it as a religious holiday, and not as a New Year's holiday. New Year's of course has its meaning, because of the changing of the year, but it has not such importance to pay attention to.

[...]

Vesa: In Kosovo, it has lately become a tradition to celebrate the End of Year holidays, not because of Christmas but because of New Year's holidays. Maybe, if I lived in Kosovo again, and if there was somebody who celebrates this holiday, I would've tried to pay attention to it, because I know how important it is for them. As for me, I don't think that it would've made a big difference, since I don't count this celebration only as Christmas, but also as a New Year's holiday.

Vesa considers New Year's to be the only holiday she celebrates with her family. She explains to me the way she and her family celebrate it, and also adds details to clarify the way the New Year's dinner gets prepared in her house, as well as the rituals she has to take care of. According to her, this holiday is the perfect time for her and her family to get altogether.

Vesa: I try to visit my family during this time. If I have some extra free time while I'm here [in Vienna], I go out with friends too. But mostly, I have to get ready to go to Kosovo for a visit,

because it's like an unwritten rule that says I must go. Just like for the ones that do celebrate Christmas, for us too, New Year's is an occasion we use to spend time with the family as well. So, not just by my family, but by most of the people in Kosovo, this is basically the way it is perceived and celebrated. It is not that we pay special attention to celebrating other holidays, for example Eid or other similar holidays. We celebrate them, but not the same as New Year's. This holiday is our favourite.

Special foods and dishes are to be noticed in Kosovar families the day they celebrate New Year's. As we have already pointed out, the role each gender plays into preparing for this holiday, undergoes differences and curves. This topic was discussed by (Shurmer 1971, 1244); (Kuper 1993, 171) and (Löfgren 1993, 232), on how women in the pre-Christmas period engage and work harder on celebration of Christmas.

Vesa indicates the same issue in her interview. She even values this issue as very problematic, considering the perspective male members observe this event from, as well as the effort they put into organizing it. However, she engages in this tradition even though it bothers her.

Vesa: There's a salad that generally gets prepared in Kosovo; it's called the Russian salad. They love it! The family gathers, and usually not only close members of the family are present, but also other relatives that we invite. Also, for example, my brother's friends come to our house after 00:00 o'clock to unify their celebration with us. We don't have a fixed schedule on when we start the celebration, or a certain tradition on how we celebrate. However, we usually gather earlier, and by 9pm we start to set the table with food. We drink, we play, we listen to music, but we don't dance. We don't give gifts to each-other. As a family we are not known as gift-giving people, but I personally have lots of fun buying presents for them, as long as I have the opportunity to. [...] We have a tradition of preparing the New Year's Eve dinner. It is usually cold food, except for the meat. What I see as a problem and what bothers me a lot, is the fact that only women have to do the preparations for this evening. All the stress regarding the food lies on the women's shoulders, while the men are only in charge of buying the drinks for themselves, as well as the things from the list (written by women) with what is needed for the dinner preparation.

The people in Kosovo also organize New Year's parties, or as they are known here in western societies, "office Christmas parties". Most of the workplaces, universities and schools' parties are organized by the end of the year. Such parties are mentioned by Vesa. She attends them every year, because she gets to see everybody there, while enjoying the festive atmosphere.

Vesa: On December 27th I flew to Kosovo, and on the same evening I attended a New Year's party with my former colleagues from the Architecture University, where we celebrated all together. This party is like a tradition and is always organized for New Year's. Except for the gifts that I bought for my family, I also bought lots of board games, and my other brother [from America] bought some too, because we as a family love to play board games when we're hanging out together. We enjoy spending a lot of time together. [...] Another tradition that we have for New Year's celebration is that we spend the first night with our family, whereas the second night with our friends. So, the second night I went out with my friends to celebrate.

The Christmas tree is the most commented element throughout Christmas or even New Year's. The participants don't particularly call it "Christmas tree", but they mostly refer to it as just a tree. Its connotation is more with New Year's than with Christmas. That's why they consider this Christmas element a New Year's element. Furthermore, in the next section, we will be discussing the rituals that Albanian Muslims practice each year while they adapt and transfer them into their families.

c) Adapting and Negotiating Christmas rituals

Adaptations can be primarily internal, psychological or sociological. They link an individual to the others in a new society and they are manifested in competence of the activities of the daily intercultural living. In this sense, people try to cope with these acculturation changes and achieve some long-term adaptations (J. W. Berry 2013, 207).

This section emphasizes the adapted rituals of Christmas through some divided under-categories starting from the participants' past experiences, to their current seasonal habitus (Klassen and Scheer 2019, 3) of engaging with Christmas rituals. Many of these Christmas elements is implemented in a different way by each Muslim Albanian family in Vienna and all of them fashion their own Christmas rituals. Albanians have changed, adapted, mixed, transformed and transferred rituals according to their own idea of celebrating.

Past experiences with Christmas rituals

Elizabeth Pleck mentioned the fact that many families or individuals, through rituals, often answer the question "*Who are we, and where do we come from?*" (Pleck 2004, 48). In my

study, the participants come from non-celebrant families and the way they are now engaged with such ritualized behaviours, is a result of their past activities.

Mrs. Berisha mentioned that she didn't grow up with any Christmas rituals, because to her family, this was not important at all. The members of her family wouldn't celebrate, but they would use this holiday to visit their relatives in Kosovo or their grandmother in Germany. However, she wishes for her children to notice and mark the significance of Christmas, and that is why she is now more Christmas-oriented.

Mrs. Berisha: Until I got married, Christmas had absolutely no meaning in our family. The only thing that we did with my family during Christmas time, was a visit to the Christmas markets. If you are not grown up with this tradition, you don't pay that much attention to it, even in school or in kindergarten. We didn't celebrate it, and I wasn't connected to this holiday, but now I am. In school you weren't exposed to such big differences during this time. The only thing that you could've done was sing in a choir. We also used to play "Engel-Bengel" with friends, to give and receive presents, but nothing more than that.

[...]

Mrs. Berisha: As I mentioned earlier, if you weren't born in a family who practices this ritual, you won't have that special feeling of celebration. It will not be that important to you. I haven't experienced such things as a kid, and now the reason why this ritual is important to me, is for sure because of my son. Maybe because of the kindergarten. Although, I am not quite sure if this is the only reason, because the same year my son was born, my sister got married, and my brother-in-law (who celebrates it) came into our family. So, I have two reasons, my brother-in-law on one hand, and my child on the other one.

[...]

Vesa: In the past [when I used to live in Kosovo] the only thing I found good about Christmas, was the fact that it was an official holiday, which meant that we didn't have to work or go to university on the 25th. You know, in Kosovo it is not as it is here. Everyone works until the 31st of December, including universities and schools. It was not a tradition to celebrate it, and I wasn't even informed what people do on this holiday. It might be that I did not have any Christian friends; we were all Muslims. I didn't feel anything Christmassy; it was more about the New Year's holiday. But now, as I visit Kosovo, I feel the same way as I do here, I feel the same atmosphere and I celebrate Christmas now.

The related activities are enjoyable, and all the participants appreciate the energy, the decorations and lights bring, as well as and the spirit of the holiday itself. They don't have any memory of celebrating Christmas when they were children. They are not used to it, and that

might be so because of their parental ambivalence or their past experiences that in a way resulted in their disengagement.

Christmas dishes rituals

For a long time, food has been an important component for family gatherings, birthdays and special celebrations. Specifically, the Christmas celebration is marked through the consumption of special foods. The participants, who do celebrate it, feel happy to have the opportunity to undergo a change of menu and dynamics in their kitchen. They try to serve special Christmas foods, whether they cook those themselves or buy them somewhere.

Some of the participants bake biscuits or so-called “*Weihnachtskekse*”, while some others decide to buy them at Christmas markets or elsewhere. They usually mark this activity by writing down every needed ingredient on their to-do list, just like Mrs. Berisha does. The biscuit ritual is something that the son of one of the participants does at his kindergarten during the whole Christmas time. She (the participant) has transferred this ritual that her son does, into her family. She experiments while baking biscuits and tries to explore more each year. She also gave me the source from where she learns how to bake them (the Austrian Food Magazine “*Gusto, Genussvolle Adventszeit*”). One thing on her to-do list was that she had to search for new biscuit recipes.

Mrs. Berisha: No, there is no such big difference, except for the fact that since my son is in kindergarten, they bake biscuits during the entire Christmas time, from the beginning of December. I also bake such biscuits at home with my son. We make the biscuits in the exact way my son does in kindergarten, and we do not combine their recipe with any Albanian recipe. I bake the Christmas biscuits as they are supposed to be baked. This is the only difference that is noticeable. I haven’t noticed any other changes in the kitchen.

[...]

Mr. Gashi: We don’t make something such as Christmas biscuits at home, as the people here do, since this is a tradition that is practiced by specifically Christian families and it is an obligation for them. But for us, it is not. We buy them at stores because we like them. At work, during this time, some of my colleagues bake at home and bring what they’ve made to work [at school] and whoever wants to, can take some. I find them very delicious and like them very much. We usually buy those, or “*Lebkuchen*” (gingerbread).

To the participants, it seems especially important that they try special seasonal foods, knowing that they only available during Christmas time. Besides the hot dishes, there are some other snacks in grocery stores, that symbolize Christmas as well. Lebkuchen and biscuits are the ones that give Vesa the first signals that Christmas is coming.

Vesa: The first sign that tells me: Christmas is coming, is when I see Lebkuchen at grocery stores. However, for me at home, the dynamics of what I usually cook doesn't change. I try to eat different kinds of food that are special during this holiday, like for example baked potatoes filled with a special sauce. I once tried to cook the same at home. As a matter of fact, Christmas actually gives me more ideas of what to cook at home. I don't have much time to cook at home anyways. That's why I prefer to eat something outside and enjoy the atmosphere while eating. On December 25th, my boyfriend and I cooked dinner together. It was very delicious. We were off work and we tried to prepare something interesting and special, just to be together, talk and eat.

The Berisha family has already engaged in a Christmas dinner tradition and is familiar with it, by mostly being invited by Mrs. Berisha's sister, the husband of whom is Christian. Their ritual of eating turkey or goose on Christmas has been significant since the year 2015. Even if Mrs. Berisha doesn't get any invitation from someone in the future, she plans to prepare the Christmas dinner herself at home, so that the children can feel the festive atmosphere inside the house and feel that they belong to this holiday. Through this tradition, she wants to make sure that her children don't feel like outsiders as they go to school and get to share their experiences with their friends.

Mrs. Berisha: We were not here this year, because we went to Kosovo. However, next year, or the year after that, when this holiday becomes important to our children, we will not be going anywhere. Instead, we will be preparing a special Christmas dinner at home. I don't want to neglect these things, even if I'm Muslim. In the past we would usually go out or would be invited for Christmas dinners. In the future, even if I don't get invited, I will try to make something festive at home. I think this will be good for the children, as they talk to each-other at school and share their experiences regarding Christmas.

[...]

Mr. Berisha: And, the last two years were more Christmassy oriented, we ate turkey and goose with our sister in-law. We haven't done this before these past two years.

The Gashi family hasn't quite developed a Christmas dinner tradition, since the family is mostly not at home during Christmas Eve, and even if they were, this wouldn't change anything regarding their eating or drinking habits. They don't feel right participating in any of these activities. They sense the atmosphere in the city, and they may try something special during this time. However, they don't have a tradition, where they prepare something special on Christmas day.

Mr. Gashi: The atmosphere is noticeable beginning from the decorations of the city and following with the special preparation of foods. You notice some of them at groceries as well. And of course, we use this time to experience a change. This is not against what is forbidden for us to eat. We eat things that our religion allows us to. When we visit Christmas markets, we can buy some souvenirs or something to eat. Usually we drink punch, kinder punch, as we want it without alcohol. They are just delicious; therefore, we drink punch every year. There is no chance for us not to go there during Christmas time to eat and drink something there. No way.

Christmas tree rituals

Other than the Gashi family, who doesn't personally decorate a Christmas tree, the other participants have mentioned this ritual many times, seemingly as something that they can't wait to do. They do it in their own way, not according to how Christians do it. They decorate the tree by the end of November or in early December. They usually keep it up until January and find this Christmas ritual the most enjoyable one.

Mrs. and Mr. Berisha: Usually we decorate the tree early in December. If we have time, we do it even sooner. We decorate our tree at the same time as the city gets decorated, so by the end of November or the beginning of December. We have the same tree from 2014 and we decorate it all together, with our children as well. I also used to decorate the tree with my family, when I wasn't married yet. This is a ritual that I have always done. Ideas on how to do the decoration vary, and they don't come only from one person, so we decide together how to do it each year. If I notice that our son prefers the red colour that year, I decide to put more red decorations in the tree. My husband goes to the basement to bring it up and then we decorate it together. We don't take our tree away as Christians do. We keep it until January. I see that at my parent's place, on December 26th the garbage container is full of Christmas trees, they get rid of them because they have a real one. I am also planning on getting one of those next year.

When asking my participants (Vesa and the Berisha family) about Christmas rituals, they really enjoyed talking about decorating the tree. The tree brings joy not only to children, as I have mentioned above, but also to adults and younger generations. They seem to have bonded with this ritual, even though it is not something very usual for them, and sometimes it is not properly done by them. Having lived in Vienna for almost four years, Vesa really enjoyed the decorated fir trees, and her wish for this Christmas was to buy “a real tree”, as she stated. She explained to me in detail why she couldn’t get one, and how sad she was about that. There were times when I had to change the topic, so that we would not only talk about Christmas trees.

Vesa: I like decorating the tree; it gives a warm atmosphere to the environment. I like to have my coffee in front of the tree and the lights. This year I decided to buy a fir tree, a real tree, as there was a place near my work, where a man was selling them. I was very excited to have a real tree, even though my room is very small. However, all that matters is that I couldn’t get my tree this year [because the man who was selling them, was not there the day I worked]. I still have the decorations I saved from the past years and when I decorate the tree with them every year, I keep it there for a longer period of time, even after New Year’s. I do that because I just love that time of the year. I mostly decorate the tree by the end of November or early in December, at the same time the city gets decorated. I want to have that same atmosphere at home as well. I don’t do it according to the ritual, as Christians do, all together as a family or something like that. Regardless, I decorate it because I feel that it makes the environment I live in warmer. I like to visit the decorated shops and bars. I always experience that good feeling.

On the other hand, the Gashi family was not one of those families in which decorating the tree was an option. They enjoy being around Christmas trees and they always try to go and visit places that are decorated, however, there is no place for a Christmas tree in their own house. When their children were little, they tried to create that same atmosphere at home and decorate a very small Christmas tree, but since the children don’t find it interesting anymore, and they understand that their religion is not Christian, the tree doesn’t play any role.

Mr. Gashi: Some families decorate the [Christmas] tree. We used to decorate it too, for the sake of the children. Lately it is more common that we aren’t home during the holidays.

There are some requirements that need to be accomplished in order to have the tree at the right place. The size of the tree is decided according to the space of the room it is going to be put in. This is a special prerequisite factor for having a small or a big tree. Both the Berisha family and

Vesa revealed this factor that plays a huge role in practicing this ritual. Since the tree is not only in the room for a few days, they try to find the right size. This way it won't stand in the way.

Mr. Berisha: It also depends on how much room we have for a Christmas tree. In the past we used to have a small apartment, so we couldn't afford to put a big tree there. We used a tree that could fit in instead, one that wasn't very big. This year for example, apart from the tree, we also put lights on windows and balconies. In our previous apartment, the tree we currently have, would've been too big to fit in. We would've had to move something in order to get some space for the tree. Even now, you see that chair there? When we decorate the tree, that chair has to move from there in order to free the space for the tree.

[...]

Vesa: The tree I decorated for two years, was a very tiny tree, because I don't have much space in the room to fit in a bigger one.

The Christmas tree is marked as a creation of Germans that somehow reveals their religious feeling. However, it is a special request by many non-Christians families as well, mostly by the children. The idea of everyone having a Christmas tree is not necessarily a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, but a tendency and wish to fit and blend in the community (Nathenson 2013, 57).

Family visiting rituals

Family gathering and unity is noticeable by the participants of this study as well. They value their relatives, therefore, they willingly spend their free time with them. The word "*family*" *ceased to mean all the members of a household, unrelated as well as related, and came to signify only the nuclear unit*" (White 1996, 5). Even though the participants have left their families and came to live in Vienna, long after they did it, they still retain a symbolic presence there, as Jack White also mentioned that the true home is the one where their childhood was spent, and the one that is always the ultimate place of returns and reunions (White 1996, 5-6). Since this holiday is marked with family togetherness, and Islam supports the idea of maintaining and bonding with the family, it is not seen as something that is against Islamic beliefs. Almost every country has a day off on Christmas Eve. In western countries, they actually have two weeks off school, which gives families the opportunity to spend more time together. Although the kindergartens are always open, the parents prefer to stay at home with

their children. For the winter holidays, all of the participants were planning on going to Kosovo. They considered this time as perfect to pay a visit to their families, relatives and friends.

Mr. Gashi: Yes, we use these two weeks of Christmas holidays to go visit our relatives, or to have them visit us.

[...]

Mrs. Gashi: Even though we don't celebrate Christmas, we go out. It is also the time when the children have their winter break, we have more free time and less stress, so we want to go out and have fun.

[...]

Mrs. Berisha: In the past years we as a family didn't celebrate, but we went to Kosovo or to Germany to visit my grandmother. So, we basically used these free days to visit our relatives.

[...]

Vesa: It can happen that during our semester breaks I have deadlines or something to do from home, but after I'm done and I am free, I usually go to Kosovo. It has happened, that I went home before Christmas, but most of the time I have to work, therefore I prefer to go after. It is the perfect time to be with all my family. My brother comes from America, while the rest of my family members in Kosovo are on winter break as well. There is no better time for family gatherings than the end of the year holidays.

The participants enjoy their free time with their close families or relatives in their homeland, leaving aside their usual assignments and feeling relaxed. Since the Gashi family considers this activity an important ritual, they add it to their to-do list. Usually their holiday in Kosovo starts between the 22nd and the 27th of December and ends after New Year's Eve.

Gift-giving ritual

The process of gift-giving can be performed by almost everyone who is engaged directly or indirectly with Christmas. This phenomenon is almost familiar to all the participants of this study as well. They partake partially in gift-giving rituals. By partially, I mean that they do give something to specific individuals each year, even though they don't receive something in return equally or constantly. Both the Berisha family and Vesa wrote on their to-do list, that this time they'd have to buy gifts for their teachers, colleagues, family members and so on.

Mrs. and Mr. Berisha: Only to our son's teachers at kindergarten. There is one with a headscarf, we gave her a present too and she accepted it. Nobody gave us any presents.

Children received some gifts from their kindergarten friends, not only from Catholics, but from Muslims as well.

Accordingly, the Gashi family has only chipped in for the teacher's present at their children's school, but other than that, they didn't have to be part of any other activities that had to do with buying presents for others.

Mrs. and Mr. Gashi: Children receive gifts from kindergarten or school. They exchange them with friends, not something special, but symbolic. They play games like "Engel-Bengel", so they get to buy each other something.

[...]

Liza: The other person is not supposed to know who his/her secret person is. The value of the present should be five to ten euros. The teachers are sometimes involved in our play as well. I picked my teacher once and I bought her chocolates and a seal cuddle toy, because she loves them. There was also a time when she picked me. She bought me a cup.

[...]

Mr. Gashi: [...] No, we have never practiced this ritual. Nobody has given us any presents, nor have we. [...] We enjoy the decorations that are prepared for the celebration, but we don't partake in the celebration itself. We don't have any obligation to buy presents, because we don't have any relatives that celebrate Christmas in our family. I think that the most stressful thing for Christians is buying presents for each other: whom do they have to buy something, what to buy, and so on. And this ritual is repeated every year. This is a Christian ritual which they've been practicing for centuries.

[...]

Mrs. Gashi: Stress is not noticeable for us, perhaps because we don't have to buy gifts. I think that all of the Christmas stress is caused because of that: what to buy, where to buy it, and so on. We don't have such stress, we only get to enjoy the views, the atmosphere and go out to different places. That's it.

They do buy gifts for their families, but they try to make it clear that they don't associate it with the Christmas gift-giving ritual. They have noticed how stressful this ritual is for Christians (Miller 2017), so they participate in it only voluntarily.

Vesa: I have noticed that people here cause themselves way too much stress to buy gifts for each-other. I don't have an obligation to do so, and there've been cases that I didn't buy anything

for anyone. However, the desire to get presents for someone arises during this time, but not as an obligation or as something that is very important.

In German speaking countries, it is common for the citizens to get an extra salary by the end of November. The purpose of this salary is to motivate employees, as well as to make it easier for the, to buy presents for others. The so-called “*Weihnachtsgeld*” (Christmas money) stimulates and invites people to be occupied with this mundane activity of shopping. It looks like people truly need this extra money, in order to convert commodities into material objects/gifts. It looks like this extra financing gets distributed in the exact right time. As Christmas money comes around, so do Christmas markets. During this time, a greater desire to shop arouses. Vesa for instance, buys gifts for herself and her family by the end of November, since she holds more money during that period.

Vesa: The reason why gifts are bought is maybe because during this period you have more money than usual, since they give you extra money for holidays.[...] It is not that you save money for this matter, but when you’re going home for a holiday and you know that your whole family is there, you want to buy something for them. [...] I bought presents for everyone. My friends and I bought something for our boss’ daughter as well. The present actually had two reasons, two in one: because his daughter was a newborn baby and it was Christmas. I got a present for my colleague too. I always try to wrap presents in a Christmassy way. I want them to be well decorated.

The relationship between two non-celebrants in their workplace, as in the case of Vesa, has adapted a ritual of gift-giving. They felt like they were left out of the holiday, therefore they wanted to participate in it by buying each-other a symbolic gift.

Vesa: My colleague and I have made a deal to buy each-other presents. We did this because we would see everybody exchanging gifts, and we would kind of feel like outsiders. Neither of us is Christian, however we agreed that we’d do the ritual of gift-giving. We kept the deal, and we exchanged gifts. I bought a souvenir with a flower for my colleague and I received chocolates in return. Sometimes, we also received gifts from Christians. They knew we didn’t celebrate it, but they wanted to give us something symbolic anyways, like chocolates.

The participants of the Berisha family want to give gifts to their children next year, by accomplishing the ritual the same way as Christians, with Santa Claus.

Mrs. Berisha: Next year I want to buy a present for my daughter, because I can see how excited she gets and besides that, I'm sure that she will expect to get a present next year. I will try to really surprise her by bringing Santa Claus or something like that. My son isn't really interested in such stuff. It wouldn't matter if you gave him the Christmas gift on January 3rd or 5th. He never paid attention to that.

Photo rituals

The sociologist Michelle Weinberger noted that “*mothers are wary of the encroachment of dominant ideology into their children's lives*” (Weinberger 2015, 391). As a matter of fact, Mrs. Berisha shows more interest in celebrating Christmas than her husband does. She is the one that tries to bond their children to this ritual. She invented some practices that weren't mentioned by any other participant, like for instance, the photo shoot. For her, this practice is something that must be done and taken care of properly each year.

Mr. Berisha: Usually if we take pictures, we take them on the 24th of December. We take other pictures by the tree throughout December, but the picture is taken just for the Christmas occasion. I mean, each of us has to wear something Christmassy. In this photo, as you can see, our children are dressed up Christmassy, as well as my wife and I. We didn't share or post this picture. There is no particular reason, but we were off to Kosovo and we didn't think about it. We usually post one picture in our social media, wishing Merry Christmas to all of our Christian friends.

The Berisha family engages with the photo shooting ritual each year on the 24th of December. This ritual took place for the first time in 2015, the year in which the first child of the family was born. It is done every year in front of the Christmas tree and with all the family members. This photo is described as something of high importance within the family. It is the time where you show a moment of excitement in the family. Another reason why they keep capturing such moments on camera, is so they have an opportunity to look at them after some years and say things such as: this was his/her first Christmas...

Mr. Berisha: Yes, we take pictures at home and usually every year in front of our tree. This we do mostly for a reason, to tell our children when they grow up, what they looked like during this time. It is a good time to measure them through Christmas. We don't send the pictures to

anybody, but we may post some on social media. We have almost all the photos from the first tree that we have decorated with our son, when he was only three months old. He helped me with his presence. We try to take a photo each year, and that way, follow and document the growth of our children.

The preparation for this photo took began month in advance. Every family member was required to be dressed up Christmassy. The woman buys something new for all four members of the family each year. As she explained to me, her experiences of shopping for this particular reason had been very stressful. The man kept saying that the emphasis of the entire good time they have on Christmas, is not only on that photo. It is not that the moment remains there because of the photo, but the photo gets captured because of that good festive moment. Meanwhile, she criticizes him by saying that she puts a lot of effort on this ritual, but the only thing that her husband does, is take the photo through the Apple watch.

Mrs. Berisha: Yes, I did put in lots of effort and prepared for like a month to take this picture. I had to go shopping for all of us, bought some Christmassy clothes, and I had to make sure and remember everyone's clothing size. I bought something for my daughter in early December, which I had to return and get something new, because I hadn't picked the right size. A month of preparation for this picture! It certainly is important! As for my husband, all he had to do on Christmas Eve was to press the button of the Apple watch to take the photo and to wear the clothes he was supposed to. That's all.

Therefore, he describes this practice as a piece of memory of a very special occasion, which took place in their home every year since their children were born, and which will continue to be present in their children's lives in the future.

Mr. Berisha: It is not that important; it is more symbolic of that moment. Honestly, it kind of takes us 24 or 30 days to take that picture, or to prepare for celebrations for this day. During this time, all she can think about is taking that picture. For her, this is something we must do. We must do the celebration, decorate the tree, dress up Christmassy, and go to her sister, if we are invited for Christmas dinner. [...] No, it is not that all the attention is on that photo. The photo represents the moment in which we are together, all dressed up. I mean, we decorate the environment, we wear Christmassy clothes, but not because of that one picture, but to make that evening meaningful. And then the photo comes due to that moment that we are together. We

celebrate either here in our apartment or we go somewhere all dressed up Christmassy, it depends.

As it seems, this ritual is very important to her. It is something that she must do, in order to feel that Christmassy atmosphere within the family. On her to-do list, she wrote down the duties that she had to do, in order to achieve a proper photo shoot. She wrote that she'd have to go shopping for this occasion and then finally take the photo.

Mrs. Berisha: For me it is something that we must do. I get very stressed until I am sure that the tree is here. Taking the picture on Christmas Eve is like a ritual that we do from 2015, from the time my son was born.

The ritual of taking photos on Christmas was noticeable from the other participants as well. They practice this ritual not only during this time but almost every day, as they mentioned. They share the photos mostly on social media, like Facebook or Instagram. They consider it as a routine, not as a new practice, since they're used to doing it in their everyday life. Seeing other people's photos, offers them awareness on where and how others are celebrating their holidays, hence this way they feel more connected to them.

Mr. Gashi: Yes, we always take pictures, even if there is no holiday. Every time we are out and there are lights, we take pictures. We share them with friends and family on Facebook or Instagram.

[...]

Mrs. Gashi: In this picture [that I looked at] it is just me and the children, because my husband was not with us on this holiday. This photo was taken in Kosovo at my family's home. We decorated the tree as a sign of New Year's celebration, not Christmas. We don't do anything special, except that the whole family gathers together, our children play and have fun with each-other, that's all.

[...]

Vesa: Yes, I take photos, and the best part of it is that they are saved automatically on my account with the date and location. There is an app, Snapchat, that recalls some memories from past years. You can see where you were last year or even earlier and what you've been doing, and I like it because it reminds me of the good moments. I can share them with others, but I prefer to save them for myself, as a memory. On social media there is a trend now to add a story that is just for that day. You post something that disappears after 24 hours.

As we can see, the Berisha family put a lot of effort into participating in the Christmas celebration. Yet, they did it in their own way. They partook only culturally in it and they did not attend incompatible activities like praying at church, or something similar to that order. They chose when and where they wanted to disengage. They emphasized some activities and minimized some others. They stuck to their rooted identity while also practicing some of the Christmas rituals.

Christmas Movies

Everything done at this time is linked to Christmas: the good vibes that come with it and the special sequences and moments that family togetherness creates. Watching Christmas movies is one other ritual done during this time. According to Vesa, watching a Christmas movie is a very enjoyable activity to do. Since in all Christmas movies, good moments spent within families are shown, she feels like she as well would want to have that good feeling these movies convey. Vesa is the only participant that mentions this ritual. On her to-do list she also mentioned that she is going to go to the cinema to watch the movie “Last Christmas”.

Vesa: I truly enjoy watching Christmas movies, or movies that are somehow related to the Christmas celebration. I get very excited. I know that during Christmas time I can't really follow my daily routine. It affects everything that I do, everywhere that I go, every movie that I watch. This year, me and my boyfriend went to watch a Christmas movie at the cinema. It was a great movie, which gave me a very good feeling. Maybe it is that connection to the family in the movie, the way they are all together and bonded, the good time they have during Christmas, that makes me feel like I want that too, and that is the reason why I like watching Christmas movies.

Advent calendar rituals

Orvar Löfgren elaborates the elements that are most commonly requested by children according pre-Christmas time. Due to this ritual, children learn how to be patient by waiting for their turn to slide a window in the calendar (Löfgren 1993, 219-220). However, the participants' children of this study don't always stick to the ritual, and sometimes open more windows than they should. They sometimes even want to open them all within the first week.

Mr. Berisha: We must buy a few Advent calendars for our son. Sometimes, he opens all of the windows within a day, even though they are meant to be opened one window a day, but he is curious and wants to know what is inside right away.

[...]

Mrs. Mr. Berisha and Liza: I open them every day. Last time it was with tea and she likes tea, so she opened one window every day. [it is common that in the first week they try to stick to the ritual, each day one window, but by the end of the week you can see all of the windows opened] But, this year she opened only one window each day.

The participants don't consider Advent calendars as an anticipation of their religious beliefs. They buy such calendars only so that they can fulfil the wishes of their children. The practices children do at school, make them curious. They tend to transfer this curiosity to their families at home.

Mr. Gashi: Advent calendars are for example shared at school, and they [the children] take some of them. Sometimes we buy them in stores, because they like them. There are some kinds of chocolates, which show up after they have opened a window each day. We buy these calendars for them, but this doesn't have any special meaning. I do it only because of the children, and I don't think it is something against our tradition or destroys my belief or my religious orientation. It is a child's wish and I try to accomplish it, that's all.

Other rituals

People of younger generations, like Vesa, who is studying apart from her family, tend to engage in the Christmas celebration in different ways as celebrants. Her relationship with non-celebrants is strengthened, since she gathers with them on Christmas day, and they create a fun, creative and unique Christmas celebration together. She feels good about spending this day with her Albanians friends who share the same ideological opinions on celebrating this day as her. Perhaps, knowing what others do on Christmas day makes her think that it should be spent with her close friends, relatives or family. However, even when she spends it with her friends, Christmas arouses a certain dose of sadness and boredom. Since her family is not there with her, she misses them and feels so far from home. This phenomenon is not mentioned from any other participant of this study and either is mentioned in the research literature that I have studied. The assumption that Christmas brings joy and is the most delightful time of the year,

is a narrative that doesn't stand for everyone and could be a good argument and example from Vesa. Therefore, this kind of stereotype is another gap that should in the research literature.

Vesa: At this time of the year, I need to be with my family and people whom I consider close, because I notice that I need their love and closeness more than ever. Holidays in general, not only Christmas, give you that feeling of sadness. I become homesick, so in my free time I try to go out as much as possible, so I don't create the space to overthink...It gives me the feeling of loneliness, sadness, and if I don't go out, I sometimes feel lost. I am more fulfilled when I am around my Albanian friends, during this time especially. Perhaps, because we are all going through the same things...

Thus, for Vesa, Christmas time becomes a time of family remembrance, highlighted emotions and homesickness. She believes she must spend this day with her close friends, and by close friends she refers to her Albanian friends. This way, she can feel closer to her social group, since the other Albanians do commonly experience the same feelings and they all go through similar things during this time.

d) Consumerism, Europeanization and Christmas Affordances

Market consumption and materialism is the first key point that brought everyone together without questioning the religion they confess. It is noticeable that all the participants do not want to resist when it comes to this key point. Everyone takes from Christmas, what they believe fits best in their daily life. They want to explore and find the way to which they feel mostly connected. Therefore, the traditional and religious way of celebrating Christmas within a family got ruined by commercialism. It is assumed that there is a greater power in capitalism, which forces us to spend several weeks pushing people in crowded shopping centers, and overthinking whether the presents we just bought will be appreciated (Miller 1993, 134).

Mr. Berisha: Buying Christmassy products is inevitable, because if you go in a shop, you notice something at first sight and of course you buy it. It is not possible to go away and not buy something for Christmas. You are directly oriented to buy. Biscuits, Lebkuchen, all of them...

Muslim families respond to the holiday, while avoiding some religiously associated rituals. They partake in some Christmas events, which they actually find inevitable. Since the Albanian Muslims have an immigrant background, they are marked by the dominant part of the society (in this case Austrian) as culturally different. The participation of the immigrant group in the Christians' celebrations, is a way of showing the dominant host culture their long-term engagement, as well as a kind of assimilation or acculturation, as Khan et. al. discussed on their study (Khan, Lindridge and Pusaksrikit 2018).

Mr. Gashi: In Kosovo, the decoration of the city is mostly done in order to look like the European countries, to look like Europe. This is emphasized more than usual and also the ones we call Christmas markets here [in Vienna], are called markets of the New Year's holiday [end-year] in Kosovo they. These markets are still new in Kosovo. They were only established about four or five years ago. It is a kind of adapting the tradition to the holiday of New Year's.

[...]

Mr. Gashi: I see it more as a resemblance that is a desire to resemble the west or adapt to something that you like. In Kosovo, people are oriented towards the west and EU integration, not only physically, but also in some way spiritually [culturally]. So, it's like you want to be part of the west with its culture and traditions.

They share their experiences of joining/visiting Christmas markets and they express the feeling they get from the environment surrounded by Christmas trees, wooden cabins and decorated cities. In multi-religious, or non-religious regions of Europe, as it is the case in Vienna, Christians and Muslims observe the cultural events of Christmas through Christians' affordances, such as historic buildings, markets, shops, schools and so on as mentioned by (Klassen and Scheer 2019, 8-9). There are also some connections and boundaries shown through consumption or consumerism. December is marked as the month of market activities that are not left out of the Muslim Albanians' attention either.

Mrs. Berisha: In December we spend a certain amount of our free time at Christmas markets. We usually drink punch and hang out by "Karlskirche" for example, which is a very nice place where our son can play around. He buys something sometimes. He likes to buy wooden letters and he bought this one at Belvedere this year [she shows me the letter].

[...]

Vesa: We usually go to Christmas markets immediately on the 16th of November. For example, this year I went with friends and I have a picture of us drinking punch. Even though I worked

the whole day and I had deadlines for university, I couldn't resist the desire to go out and see the decorations. I love it. Even though it is the same every year, I am happy to see it over and over again. [...] And, speaking of the whole month of December, I am usually also very stressed because of studying. But the Christmas market gives you the feeling that you as well need to celebrate and go out. Especially since the Christmas market is close to my university [Faculty of Technology] and I constantly walk through it, it is always tempting.

The Christmas market has a special significance in transmitting the feeling of Christmas. Regardless of the fact that it appears the same every year, people always express an interest to be around that environment. For the participants, Christmas markets bring a change of atmosphere, which they actually need during wintertime. They prefer to meet with their friends outside and they rarely go to indoor bars or restaurants. They try to visit new Christmas markets. As a matter of fact, all the participants wrote on their to-do list, that they plan to visit more Christmas markets this year.

Mr. Berisha: We meet with our friends as well. During this time of the year, we always prefer to meet with friends outside by the Christmas markets. We rarely go to indoor bars or restaurants. We try to stay outside and enjoy the atmosphere as much as possible.

[...]

Mr. Gashi: We usually go to the "Rathaus" (city hall) almost every year. We also visited "Stephansplatz" and this year we also went to "Hirschstettner Blumengärten". It is a pleasant climate, especially in the first district there are so many people. It is a warmer atmosphere.

[...]

Liza: Yes, I like visiting Christmas markets. They are beautifully decorated and I can buy something there. There is a corner with sweets, so when I go to the market with my classmates, I buy candies there.

All you can hear from the workers at shops or at Christmas markets at this time of the year is: stress, tension, too much work, and too little time. Some of the stores begin with the preparation a few months in advance, filling the stores with the needed products, so that they can have a good "*Weihnachtsgeschäft*" (Christmas sales) when the time comes. If particular shops didn't have good sales during the year, Christmas might give them an opportunity to increase their sales and compensate for what they didn't earn earlier that year. As we may notice, the German naming of symbols or activities related to Christmas, is associated not only with the celebration of the birth of Christ, but also with economic matters such as shopping and materialism.

e) Atmosphere and activities in public and private spheres

Most of the people in the city enjoys the change of their daily scenery around November and December. They feel the warm atmosphere and experience it through decorations and the brightness of lights. Some of the participants got stimulated by these symbols and transferred them to their domestic private sphere, by decorating their own Christmas tree or putting up lights on their balconies. In the public sphere you can be invited to join office parties or some other attendances, the schedules and scenarios of which are fixed and organized from competent people. However, in the private sphere you can organize and negotiate the ideal celebration of your own Christmas. The participants seem to feel very happy as they engage in Christmas celebrations in their own way.

Vesa: However, after I get off work, if my friends are free, we gather and go out somewhere, on these days in particular. Although the atmosphere outside is a bit quiet and there aren't so many people out, knowing what's going on with the rest at their homes, you can't just stay at home alone. You need to do something. [...] So, I mean, I can't wait until this time of the year comes. I wish that someone from my family or friends comes to visit me at this time of the year, to see how beautiful the city gets. [...] I would never go somewhere else where there is no such festive atmosphere during this time of the year.

[...]

Mrs. Berisha: I love this time. I like it very much. It is a different atmosphere here at home, outside and in kindergarten. Our son learns lots of songs, he sings them at home. It is nice to go outside, lights everywhere. We adore these things.

As we may have seen on the sections above, the participants did already engage in public acts of Christmas, such as visiting Christmas markets, partaking in Christmas events at schools or kindergartens, buying Christmassy food or taking photos.

In order for them to be part of the events that get organized in the public sphere, such as the office Christmas parties etc., there are some conditions that they must consider in advance.

For instance, Mr. Gashi does not participate in his office Christmas party, because they serve alcohol and he feels like he doesn't fit in there. As a family, they don't exchange gifts with anyone, and they don't decorate the tree. Though, they used to decorate a tree and give some presents to their children because they asked for it when they were little. They said that they enjoy the Christmas atmosphere outside and they willingly visit Christmas markets and drink "Kinderpunsch" (punch without alcohol).

Mr. Gashi: In my workplace [in the school where I work] Christmas celebration is not as noticeable as it is in other schools. However, at the beginning of Christmas time, they start to organize some events. Every school organizes a party around mid-December. They arrange that some children participate in the event through paintings or songs. The event takes place in the school's yard. It lasts three days and it is like an Advent market with wooden cabins. The parents prepare some food to bring with them and sell. The money earned from the food sold at the market goes to the school budget and is used for school's needs. This is the time when you can feel the Christmas atmosphere. There are paintings put on walls with Christmassy symbols too. They also organize a party for the teachers only, in a restaurant outside of school, usually on a Friday evening. I never went to any of these parties. It is because I am Muslim and I teach Muslim religion at school. They also drink alcohol there. In a way I don't fit in this tradition and the way they celebrate it. I don't mind them drinking alcohol, but I simply don't have any interest in that event.

A few times they mention that they consider their participation in a Christmas party at the children's school, football club or kindergarten, as integration in western society, and not as a deviance from their religion. The Christmas parties at their children's schools, attached to some other activities, are to be noticed on their to-do list, marked as important events in which they have to partake.

While most offices are closed, some restaurants and shops work on Christmas day with a shortened schedule. Vesa offered to work on Christmas Eve, in order to give a chance to the ones who do celebrate it, to spend it with their families. In return, she asked for a week off near New Year's Day. Giving her co-workers a gift and receiving one reciprocally, is a way of strengthening her relationship with them. Meanwhile she also maintains her identity as a non-celebrant by willing to work on December 24th and 26th.

Vesa: Yes, I usually have to work on the 24th, 25th and 26th, because I am not Catholic and I do not celebrate this holiday.

The participants are motivated by their individual choices. Whether they celebrate Christmas within a larger society or within the privacy of their homes, depends on their personal matters and choices. As we pointed out above, the participants engage in public events, such as their children's school's Christmas parties, office Christmas parties, visits to Christmas markets, gift exchanging with co-workers, friends or even teachers. These actions can be identified on one

hand as “acculturation outcome of integration” (J. W. Berry 1997, cited from Khan et al., 2018, p. 297) into the Austrian society. Or, on the other hand, they may be identified as voluntary actions, done with pleasure, which accordingly match their personal desires.

Berry and Khan et al. claim that the public actions can be described as an integration behavior, but these terms do not explain the events that are done within the private domestic sphere (Khan, Lindridge and Pusaksrikit 2018, 297).

I could partially argue with that statement, because the information I gained from the participants, especially from the Berisha family during my research, helped me acknowledge that everything done regarding the Christmas celebration in a private sphere, might reflect the public one. The ritual, in which they willingly engage, is something that they want to pass to their children.

For the Gashi family, their home environment reflects neither the festive atmosphere of Christmas, nor that of New Year’s. I visited their apartment during November and December 2019 and from my observation, their private space remained casual as always, without any changes. Yet, there were some “Weihnachtskekse”, “Lebkuchen” and some Advent calendars on the table. Since their children wish to have them and it is not against any Islamic belief, they do buy them. According to the Gashi family, the enjoyment of such a festive atmosphere can happen without having to directly or necessarily engage with Christmas. During this time, their family takes the opportunity to find and observe new things around the city, and it is a pleasure for them to be outside.

Mr. Gashi: No, we just participate in enjoying the view. We love the city decorations, as well as the Christmas markets. Therefore, we do take advantage to be there, to take pictures, to eat and drink something.

In contrary, the Christmas mood in the Berisha family is noticeable starting from November. Except for the Christmas tree, which they decorate every year, this year, they put lights in their windows and balcony as well. A cooking magazine containing Christmassy biscuit recipes, was to be seen on the dining table, near the kitchen.

The Berisha family and Vesa participate in both private and public Christmas spheres. They do so by joining office Christmas parties or going out to other Christmas parties, exchanging gifts with work colleagues, drinking alcohol and celebrating Christmas Eve.

Vesa: We also went to on a party with friends [Austrians and Albanians] on the 15th of December. It was actually a Christmas party. It was a very beautiful evening, accompanied by music from the 80s. While they [at the party] were playing Christmas songs, you could feel their happiness; it was obviously the atmosphere of that period. It was a Christmas party. One more thing worth mentioning, I was invited on December 10th to one of my friends for dinner. So, this is mostly what I do during this time. As long as I have the chance to have fun, I take it.

[...]

Mrs. Berisha: We also have a Christmas party every year. First, we have dinner and after that, we usually go to a club we book for this occasion. Every year, we receive Christmas presents from our office.

[...]

Mr. Berisha: In my workplace, even though 99% of the employees are Muslim and our company is actually an Albanian institution, we always organize a Christmas party by the end of the year. We book a restaurant and have a Christmas dinner. Last year, we organized the party in our office. We were invited to take our families as well and there was Santa Claus who gave presents to our kids. Indeed, we prepared those gifts ourselves and gave them to Santa, so that he would come and surprise our children.

At the restaurant where Vesa works, the celebrants are a minority. Therefore, she claimed that that's the reason why they don't throw an office Christmas party. She got to participate in such parties in her previous jobs and she says that she liked them.

Vesa: In my previous jobs, they usually organized a dinner in honour of Christmas. We had so much fun. In my current job, we were about to organize something, but the plan didn't get realized. Maybe because there are more people who don't celebrate Christmas than those who do, so they did not pay that much attention to that. But I personally like this kind of celebration with colleagues.

On Christmas day, most workplaces are closed. On Christmas Eve, you don't have very much of a choice on deciding where to celebrate by eating or drinking something. You are directly oriented on going to the non-celebrants' places, like Vesa did with her friends. She went to an Albanian bar on Christmas Eve, because everything else was closed.

Vesa: On the 24th I worked until 3 pm, the workplace was open until then. Our friends came to our workplace to wait for us, so that we would go out to drink somewhere. After I finished work, we went to a bar, [the owner of which is Albanian], because on that day almost everything is

closed and you don't have much of a choice. We drank a lot, only because we started celebrating so early. It was a very pleasant evening.

Stressful activities

Stress is existent in daily life, but it is especially expressed during Christmas time. However, not every participant finds this time stressful. For Mrs. Berisha, it is stressful mainly because of the process of buying gifts and clothes. For Mr. Berisha, (he speaks as "we") this time is more dynamic rather than stressful. He would describe it better as a motive that arouses a desire to go out with the children, to visit places, see the lights and so on. For the Gashi family, this time is not stressful, since they don't follow any of the Christmas rituals. They find this period only enjoyable, not stressful.

Mrs. Berisha: [Stressful time] It is all related to how to get the presents. We stress about buying the clothes for the photo. We get new Christmassy clothes each year.

[...]

Mr. Berisha: Stress, no, actually no, it doesn't quite have an effect on me, but you can feel that life around this time is more dynamic. In our family it is not noticeable. We would rather describe it as a motive to go out with the kids to see the lights, eat or drink something and visit Christmas markets. The city gets decorated and our kids love visiting it during this time. Vienna is just beautiful at this time of the year, especially the "Rathaus" (city hall), simply fabulous. Even though it is very well-attended, it is worth going there at least three to four times during Christmas time.

I can say that my workplace experiences the most highlighted wave of stress in December. It is the only time when all the co-workers are at work at the same time. In order to achieve good sale numbers, the preparation begins a few months in advance. In December, everything's about the sales. Nevertheless, for Vesa, Christmas time is described as not stressful at all. At her work, a restaurant in Vienna, this period remains quiet. She has more time to chat with the other colleagues and enjoy each-other's company.

Vesa: No, it is not a stressful time, in contrary, it is very quiet. All my colleagues are happier, because some of them are going on holidays to their families. As for us who remain here, we also have a good time and enjoy each-other's company. It is very quiet, not so much work to do,

especially on 24th and 26th of December. The workplace was open, but there weren't so many people. You have more time to talk and discuss with colleagues.

Winter and Christmas atmosphere

Coldness symbolizes wintertime and wintertime symbolizes Christmas time, or the other way around. Wintertime is marked through some holidays, as it is the case with Christmas. Some participants mentioned that they have some association with wintertime. That coldness in wintertime makes their Christmas time even more meaningful.

Bubuline: [...] Does this picture symbolize Christmas time?

Mr. Berisha: Indeed, it symbolizes wintertime more. Christmas time too, but not as much as wintertime. Christmas is actually connected to winter holidays, as well as New Year's.

[...]

Mr. Gashi: It is a change, and the winter with its coldness at this time of the year, makes it even more beautiful.

On the other hand, Vesa does not have such an association with wintertime. For her, wintertime connotes snow. Knowing that in Vienna it rarely snows, she doesn't get that real feeling winter is supposed to bring. Therefore, she believes that Christmas time isn't that much related to wintertime. In fact, according to her opinion, everything is related only to Christmas itself.

Vesa: No, it does not associate with winter to me, not so much. This might be because although it is very cold in Vienna, it rarely snows, and you don't experience the real wintertime without the snow. But it definitely associates with Christmas. Also, all the decorated places' names are linked with Christmas, as well as the dates when the markets open and close. So, everything is related to Christmas, Christmas market names, dates, their opening and closing dates.

December activities

December is marked as a different month from all the other ones. The daily life and its practices change during this month. Consequently, its routine can't be observed as a normal daily routine, as it is in October, for example. In December one can feel the good, as well as the stressful atmosphere. These changes are spotted by every participant in this study.

Mrs. Berisha: In December, the daily routine changes a lot. You can't expect to have the same daily routine as you do in October. While both November and December are very stressful. However, it's a totally different kind of stress in December.

[...]

Mr. Gashi: There is a change in December for sure. In addition to approaching the new year, there are also Christmas holidays that create a different climate. You may notice changes both outside and inside the houses. For example, Christmas tree decoration, some of them decorate their houses with lights around the windows, others decorate their homes only inside. They all have their own ways of decoration and celebration.

[...]

Mrs. Gashi: When you live in a country with a Christian majority, you can see that the change is even bigger regarding the end of year holidays. However, in Kosovo, decorating the city, especially by the last month of the year, has started becoming a tradition in the last few years, even though the majority is Muslim.

Whilst December is marked as a month of celebrations, the environment you are in during this time tends to have an important role in creating that feeling of fulfilment. Even if people had a hard and stressful year, in December they try to reflect on the good things that surround them and the things they need to do for themselves. For some, December can be the most enjoyable month. However, for Vesa it connotes sometimes boredom and sadness.

Vesa: Yes, December is pretty different. I would say in both good and bad ways sometimes. In a bad way because it evokes some feelings that you don't experience during the rest of the year. For instance, this time brings up feelings of boredom and sadness. But on the other hand, it is a time when you reflect that you need to do good things for yourself, to be with your family. It is in a way important that in the last month of the year, you try to have good days, to wrap up the year in the best way possible and to be fulfilled by the beginning of the next year. Generally, during this month I have more energy than usual. It is very sad that this period ends, but personally I am always looking forward to it. I mean it is not like the other days of the year...it is special.

December is a determination for a suitable Christmas celebration. Daily life is oriented towards shopping, visiting Christmas markets, and consumerism in general. Besides Christmas celebrations, December is also the last month of the year. This means, people try to wrap up the year in the best way possible, so that they start the next year feeling fulfilled. In December, the

city is almost always very visited by tourists and inhabitants. A Christmas market can be spotted in every corner of the city. The city is almost always full of people, which sometimes makes it hard to walk across the streets. These days cannot be perceived as usual, even if one doesn't celebrate Christmas. The end of the holidays can be sad, since after that, usual daily life begins and ends this enjoyable time.

Conclusion

Christmas appears to be an odd ritual. The participation in its events and celebrations indicates belonging, while otherwise avoiding or forgoing it, marks one as different. It is quite obvious that the more rooted the immigrants feel themselves in the host country, the more they alter their response to Christmas.

The changes that participants of this study case experience in their daily life in the multicultural city of Vienna, shape their ideas, concepts, and diverse their connection with Christmas. In this matter, the questioning of their immigrant background was important in order to understand how close they interact with Christmas celebrations, what experiences they have, do they call themselves celebrants or just participants? What rituals are more or less important for them? Is Christmas seen as cultural or religious?

Mrs. Berisha, who lives in Vienna since 1998, was only eight years old when she went to school in a new, unknown social environment in Vienna. She has no memory of ever celebrating Christmas with her family. However, she has some memories of her childhood at her school, when she used to sing in the choir and exchange little gifts with her friends. Her husband on the other side, came to study in Vienna in 2007. He had no Christmas childhood experiences. Even though there are some related elements that he is familiar with, he rather connotes them with New Year's celebrations. Being unfamiliar with Christmas rituals since their childhood denoted a mixed-up ritual sequence, such as the Christmas tree decoration in early December. They maintain their own tradition of celebrating Christmas, i.e. not moving too far from their roots. They still have some different opinions regarding Christmas celebrations: Mrs. Berisha was involved in celebrating Christmas in a proper way, and she plans on doing it every year, while her husband is more reserved when it comes to Christmas celebrations.

Nevertheless, Mr. Gashi came to study in Vienna in 2004, while his wife joined him two years later. They show a stronger engagement with Islamic beliefs, and they do share the same opinion on celebrating this holiday. This family doesn't see Christmas as an integral part of the family's daily life. Yet they are more connected to New Year's Eve.

The next example is Vesa, who recently came to study in Vienna (2016). She has no Christmas childhood experiences either. At the beginning of her new life in Vienna, Christmas seemed to

be a new unknown territory, which later got habituated in her daily life. She now engages culturally in some Christmas rituals. As she speaks of Christmas, it is noticeable that its emphasis passes over to New Year's celebrations.

I raised the hypothesis that the more years Muslim Albanians lived in Vienna, the bigger the connection with the culture of western society, and the more they work and socialize with Austrian society, the more they engage in the western culture.

Within the three samples that this study has researched, we can assume that the thesis raised up from me, could be partially proven. The participants who have been socialized in the Austrian society longer, engage in these rituals voluntarily: Firstly, Mrs. Berisha, who as a child did not have any connection to Christmas, but does now, and her husband who works with Albanians and was not connected, even though nowadays it is important to celebrate Christmas for the sake of the children, however is still not engaged with Christmas as much as his wife. They want to pass this tradition to their children, by repeating the Christmas rituals every year. On the other hand, the Gashi family has been in Vienna since 2004, and still has no such traditions with the Christmas holiday. This is because of their Muslim beliefs and Mr. Gashi's profession as a religious teacher at school. Even their children born and raised in Austria have no such connection with Christmas. Lastly, Vesa was not involved with Christmas in her past and only came to Vienna recently, but tries to experience Christmas and to practice some Christmas rituals.

Being identified as Muslim, didn't stop the participants from undergoing changes during the years in which Austrian society became their current residence. These changes actually led to them being familiar with the traditions of their host country, even though some of the participants don't accomplish them as an integral part of their family. Belief and religious practices vary within families and individuals. For the Gashi family, Muslim religious rituals such as praying and fasting, are part of their daily routine, and the engagement with Christmas is not seen as a ritual that they want to practice. They partake only in celebrations in which their presence is required, such as kindergarten or school events. Other than that, they only enjoy the decorated trees and events in the public sphere. On the contrary, for Vesa and the Berisha family, those Muslim religious rituals might not be relevant at all to their daily lives, or might only be relevant on special occasions, like Eid for instance. They are engaged with Christmas, and it is noticeable how the desire of practicing Christmas rituals in the right way increases

every year, like decorating the fir tree, giving Christmas gifts, having Christmas parties and Christmas dinners.

For Muslims, Christmas is a holiday in which they can partake and which they can celebrate in their own way. There is no fixed or defined line on how to adapt and incorporate it into their family's life. According to the Berisha family, Christmas celebrations don't have to be kept away from their children, just because of their religion. Children actually are the ones who increase the importance of Christmas and their families' involvement in it. Seeing Children as a very important factor when it comes to celebrating Christmas, by which parents get influenced to incorporate such rituals, I was very interested in learning more from children's experiences and being around them while they partake on some social events at their schools or kindergartens. Since Christmas season is not that long and educational institutions have specific privacy rules, this was not possible. Consequently, this topic stays open for the next research.

In general, Christmas affects school and kindergarten activities, sales, shopping, socio-economic life, daily life routine, tourism, consumption and many other cultural events.

In a more specific way, Christmas affects Muslim families and their children repeatedly every November and December. Moreover, it shapes their engagement with it, even if there is no straight or direct desire to be part of it. This happens because of the place they live in and its political and religious system.

To recapitulate, at first sight, Christmas rituals begin with visiting Christmas markets, putting up lights, a Christmas tree, drinking punch, or eating snacks. The intensity of transformation gets more noticeable each year. As the years pass by, the interviewed get to know western culture better. Get to work with people belonging to that culture and be part of their daily life. After having lived in Vienna for almost a decade (or more) they will probably end up exchanging gifts with colleagues and friends, baking Christmas biscuits, watching Christmas movies, decorating the Christmas tree (by the end of November), sending and receiving Christmas cards, eating Christmas dinner on Christmas Eve or celebrating Christmas (with their Albanian Muslim friends). Although not every Christmas element is accomplished the same way as it is by Christians, this behaviour explains how Albanian Muslims acculturate to Austrian society, whilst keeping their Islamic beliefs.

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Interviews

-Berisha family (Mrs. and Mr. Berisha) interviewed on 16.02.2020 (the length of the interview was 00:39:32).

-Gashi family (Mrs., Mr. Gashi and Liza and Olt) interviewed on 19.02.2020 (the length of the interview was 00:36:26).

-Vesa, interviewed on 19.02.2020 (the length of the interview was 00:45:03).

Abstract English

Christmas is considered to be the most widespread and well-known event in the world. Billions of people are affected by it in one way or another, including Albanian Muslims in Vienna. This master's thesis explores the question of how Christmas is celebrated by Albanian Muslim families in Vienna. After asking what celebrating Christmas means to them, I examined which practices and experiences they associate with it and which factors play an important role among them. Using selected examples, this master's thesis shows how members of a religious minority deal with this religious or cultural event and give Christmas an important place in their lives. Regardless of their religious beliefs, people living in Vienna seem to inevitably come to terms with the event of Christmas.

Abstract German

Weihnachten gilt als das weltweit am weitesten verbreitete und bekannte Fest. Milliarden Menschen sind in der einen oder anderen Weise davon betroffen, darunter auch albanische Muslime in Wien. Diese Masterarbeit geht der Frage nach, wie Weihnachten von albanisch muslimischen Familien in Wien gefeiert wird. Nach der Frage der Bedeutung untersuche ich, welche Praktiken und Erfahrungen die Befragten Personen mit Weihnachten verbinden und welche Faktoren eine besonders wichtige Rolle spielen. An ausgewählten Beispielen zeigt diese Masterarbeit, wie Angehörige einer religiösen Minderheit sich mit diesem religiösen bzw. kulturellen Ereignis auseinandersetzen und welchen Platz Weihnachten in ihrem Leben einnimmt. Unabhängig von ihrer religiösen Überzeugung, scheint die Auseinandersetzung mit Weihnachten für in Wien lebende Menschen unausweichlich zu sein.