Post-Gay Faces, Post-Gay Spaces: Exploring the Politics of Inclusion of Non-Heterosexual Women in the Alternative Social Scene in Belgrade

By

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Abstract

In this paper I examine the emerging phenomenon of alternative "gay-friendly" social scene in Belgrade (Serbia) by focusing on the experiences of non-heterosexual women that visit the alternative gay-friendly clubs and late-night bars in Belgrade. The conclusions drawn are based on etnographic research, which consisted of participant observation and fifteen interviews with non-heterosexual women who regularly or occasionally attend the alternative social scene and openly express their homoerotic desire in it. I interpret the alternative gay-friendly social scene as a post-gay space, which constitutes a place of belonging for "post-gay" women. The term post-gay, in the sense I am using it, refers to the space in which sexual orientation of its inhabitants ceases to function as a relevant marker of the space, and at the same time, it is a reference to non-heterosexual women who repudiate sexual orientation as a marker of their identity or reject sexual categorization altogether. I argue that post-gay identity and post-gay spaces in the context of Belgrade are bounded by middle-class belonging and embedded in the homonormative discourse of respectability. Therefore, they stand in opposition to the queer space of LGBT social scene in Belgrade, that welcomes people of different classes and is situated beyond the normalizing regimes. Nevertheless, I argue that the post-gay spaces in Belgrade at the same time allow for queer transgressions of homonormativity, by the virtue of accepting the rupturing of gender norms and practices of monogamous relationships.

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Contents

1. Introduction

In November 2014 a lesbian friend of mine was excitedly retelling me her previous weekend "night out" stories. Having moved recently from Berlin to Belgrade, she looked positively surprised with Belgrade night scene: "The places I go out to remind me of Berlin", she said, emphasizing the widespread usage of drugs, the "gay-friendliness" of these places and the orgy-after-parties she occasionally attends.

She did not need to go out to LGBT places to meet a girl anymore, she claimed. Finally, Belgrade can offer her a more exciting alternative gay-friendly scene, where people "much more alike her" go out to. She then proceeded to explain to me that this is because, unlike in LGBT clubs, non-straight (lesbian, bisexual, sexually fluid, queer, etc.) women who attend the alternative scene are all "good-looking, educated and mostly feminine "urban celebrities"[1].

The next weekend the same friend took me out to one of the most famous alternative late-night bars in Belgrade. When we arrived, she greeted her partner with a long kiss on the lips, yet it seemed that no one around paid any attention to it. Throughout the night, she introduced me to her non-straight female friends who were also regular visitors. After talking to my friend and her acquaintances and after seeing women casually kissing and flirting with each other, it was obvious to me that a significant number of non-straight women were present at this venue.

It was surprising to see that in the capital of a post-socialist country regarded at the same time as not "European" enough[2] and Europe's homophobic Other (Kulpa, 2014; Kahlina, 2015)

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[1] "Urban celebrity" is common name used as a reference to young people in Belgrade between the ages of 20 and 40 who are regular visitors of nightclubs ("clubbers") and who oftentimes have jobs that suppose some kind of public appearance (such as underground musicians). Consequently, they have wide social circles of friends, acquaintances and followers on social networks, which makes them well-known among Belgrade youth, hence the term "urban celebrity".

[2] As Petrović (2014) argues, socialism is not seen as European legacy. Therefore, the socialist past prevents Serbia and other Eastern European countries from "fully integrating into "democratic Europe"" (p. 10).

there is space for affirmation of non-heterosexual identities outside of LGBT context. Namely, after the fall of the socialist regime of Slobodan Milosevic in 2000, Serbia has begun its transformation to a democratic country, the goal of which – according to what Serbian politicians have been advocating ever since – should be the appropriation of "European" values. But what does it mean to be "European" enough? In comparison with most of European Union countries that have brought laws to protect sexual minorities and in many cases even grant them right to enter civil unions or marry, Serbia has been casted away as the less developed homophobic Other (Kahlina, 2015, p.3 ; Kulpa, 2014, p. 432), a society in need of Western European guidance on its path towards emancipation. Consequently, the question of rights of sexual minorities in Serbia became one of the crucial indicators of Serbia's "Europeanness", its fitness for joining the EU. Kahlina (2014) demonstrates that in "Western European" discourse, Serbian government's continuous banning of Pride Parades or incompetence to prevent violent clashes in Pride Marches that did take place have been used as proof of "Eastern European difference… that has framed this region as not European enough" (Kahlina, 2015, p.3).

Appropriating "European" values as Kulpa (2014) and Kahlina (2015) have demonstrated; among other things include protecting human rights and therefore, the rights of sexual minorities as well. Nevertheless, Serbia's post-communist/ post-socialist transformation towards becoming a worthy "European" country did not go smoothly. The first attempt to organize a Pride March in 2001 had a violent finale. Between 2001 and 2014 only two Pride Marches took place: Pride March in 2010 ended up in violent struggles across Belgrade, while Pride Parade in 2014 was the first Pride in Serbia that did not undergo such violent clashes on a larger scale.

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Moreover, in 2009 the Anti-Discrimination Act for protecting sexual minorities from discrimination was brought. It was brought on the insistence of EU and as a direct condition for Serbia's accession to White Schengen zone, i.e. in return, Serbian citizens were allowed to travel to most of EU countries without visas (Kahlina, 2014, p. 5). However, the Anti-Discrimination act did not do much in terms of protection of LGBT minorities: LGBT people in Serbia have been discriminated against – both verbally harassed and physically attacked – in schools, on workplaces, and on streets[3], as well as in public social places, such as bars and clubs. For example, a couple of my interviewees recounted me the stories about being verbally abused and kicked out from cafes and restaurants for publicly kissing their girlfriends.

In brief, the political and social climate regarding the protection of LGBT individuals in Serbia has not been bright. If a generalization had to be made, describing Serbian society as homophobic (see Mršević, 2013) would not be an understatement. Nevertheless, the status of LGBT individuals in Serbia differs depending both on the class they belong to and the class conditionings they have internalized. Class belonging, in this sense, connotes not only economic status, but also educational and familial background, which is one of the determining factors in the network of relationships among these people and also their surroundings. Therefore, middle-class individuals would be those who come from families who can afford them comfortable life and have, at the same time, obtained a University degree. Since they come from well-situated families[4], these individuals, at the same time, are not obliged to "work for living" during studies

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[3] One of the most covered stories in the last couple of years was the story about a young woman who was attacked in 2011 nearby a famous LGBT club in Belgrade for wearing an LGBT T-shirt ("Devojka napadnuta", 2011). More recently, in April 2015 a young man was kicked out of cab and beaten by the cabdriver who overheard the young man telling his friend a story about a man he liked (G.N., 2015).

[4] It is crucial to pinpoint that being well-off in the context of Serbia is not only a reference to the "educated middle-class", but – as Jansen (2005) pointed out – it can also be an asset of a special category in the Serbian society known as "frontline peasants". Frontline peasants, Jansen (2005) demonstrates, is a term used by Serbian urban middle-class to refer to "new money" individuals. These "new-money" people, according to the Serbian urban middle-class, are those who despite having money still do not possess the "sophistication" of the urban middle class (Jansen,

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or as soon as they graduate, but have the option to wait until the job appealing to them comes along or they have family connections that can provide them with better job opportunities. However, as Bourdieu (1984), in his conceptualization of class, elucidates, class cannot be defined only "by its position in the relations of production, as identified through indices such as occupation, income or even educational level" (p. 102), but as a broader condition which pre-inscribes a certain life-style and even a mindset locating an individual into certain discourses, in accordance with which one internalizes certain knowledge about how to act, what to appreciate or like in conformity with his/her class condition. In line with this broader sense of class, Serbian middle-class youth tend to be engaged in hobbies or occupations which suppose the appreciation of artistic and creative work, therefore, many of them work as freelancers in creative spheres, such as visual and drama arts, music, communications, etc. Moreover, they have studied and travelled more as a result both of their financial situation and another class conditioning they have acquired. It is also not a coincidence that it is usually amongst the middle-class that one could find individuals that are "more enlightened" when it comes to environmentalism, animal and human rights, including the support for LGBT rights.

However, Serbia's middle-class constitutes a small percentage of Serbian society and is mostly present in urban centers of Belgrade, Novi Sad and Subotica. Working class people and the poor, on the other hand, constitute a majority of Serbian society. They have less-paid jobs, do not have higher education and are a majority in provincial areas, or – in the case of Belgrade – they live in remote Belgrade districts or suburbs. At the same time, Serbian working-class is (at least in higher degree than the middle-class) connected to conservative political stands, which in

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2005, p. 154). For instance, the frontline peasant men, unlike the urban middle-class men, can be identified by wearing white socks, being semiliterate and loud on the streets, while frontline peasant women can be discerned by dressing tastelessly and having silicones (Jansen, 2005, p. 154).

the Serbian context among other things suppose disinterest in human rights, lack of support for LGBT rights and oftentimes homophobia. As a result, there is a stark difference between LGBT everyday life in rural, more conservative areas largely populated by the working class and the poor and urban centers, such as Belgrade, the middle-class center where various types of LGBT events are being organized every week.

Serbia is a centralized country and ever since the 19th century, and especially after the communist victory in 1945, the urbanization of Belgrade has been rapid (quoted in Jansen, 2005, p. 161). With around two million inhabitants (out of Serbia's total seven million), Belgrade has the status of Serbia's cultural and educational middle-class center. Belgrade University attracts most of Serbia's students, higher salaries attract most of the workforce and its social scene attracts the tourists who, exactly because of its vibrant nightlife, named it "new Berlin" ("Hedofer: Beograd", 2014; "Italijanska štampa", 2014). At the same time, with the exception of the second largest city, Novi Sad, Belgrade is the only city in Serbia that has had an active LGBT social scene since 2003, the year when the first gay club was opened. Nowadays, Belgrade LGBT social scene is small, consisting of two clubs and a few cafes. However, as I have already mentioned, in the last six years, an alternative gay-friendly social scene has been developing in Belgrade.

Nevertheless, researching an LGBT-related topic in the context of Serbia is a challenging task, considering that scholarship on LGBT issues in Serbia has been scarce and mostly centered on the problematization of the relationship between the improvement of LGBT rights in Serbia and the Europeanization of Serbian society (Mikluš, 2011, Kahlina 2015, Kulpa, 2014). Substantial ethnographic pieces of research are even scarcer, with the exception of Irene Dioli's (2011) research on lesbian activism in Serbia. Moreover, everyday life of LGBT people in rural

areas in Serbia has not been researched at all, while ethnographic investigations of life in urban environment – that is to say Belgrade – fall down to Isidora Jarić's (2011) investigation of discrimination and violence towards LGBT people in Belgrade and Liselotte Van Velzen's (2007) research on the possibilities and limitations of being "out", i.e. openly gay in Belgrade in 2000s. Therefore, no research so far has tackled the question of contemporary geography of sexualities in Belgrade, either regarding the official LGBT social scene or the gay-friendly social scene.

Consequently, I aim to fill in the gap in anthropological research on LGBT issues in Serbia by changing focus from negative discourses centering upon the discrimination of non-heterosexual individualsin Serbia to a discourse that opens up a possibility for the affirmation of non-heterosexual female identities. Namely, I argue that even in the severely homophobic environment of a post-socialist Eastern-European country such as Serbia, the urban environment can offer space for an affirmation of non-heterosexual female identities outside the LGBT context. More specifically, I want to shed light upon a phenomenon currently taking place in Belgrade, a phenomenon which is not in accordance with the homophobic discourse surrounding Serbia and its capital: the acceptance and affirmation of female non-heterosexual identities in non-LGBT public social spaces, such as late-night bars and clubs.

In this paper I examine the emerging phenomenon of development of alternative "gay-friendly" social scene in the specific "homophobic" and "not European enough" context of Belgrade, Serbia. The alternative gay-friendly social scene refers to a small number of late-night bars and clubs scattered around Belgrade, which do not form a part of the official LGBT social scene in Belgrade. I argue that alternative social scene in Belgrade serves as an example of what Brown (2006) named "post-gay" spaces: "spaces… where sexual difference is visible and

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acknowledged without being the central marker of the space" (p. 133). Alternative clubs in Belgrade, therefore, function as post-gay spaces by the virtue of being visited both by straight and a significant number of non-straight women and men who publicly express their homoerotic desire, albeit in a "respectable" manner. Among LGBT and the people who are not identify as heterosexuals or not practice exclusively heterosexual relationships, these clubs are also known as "gay-friendly" clubs, since they are known to constitute a safe hotspot for urban Belgrade LGBT population. Consequently, depending on the context, I will refer to this scene both as "alternative (gay-friendly) social scene" and as "post-gay space" interchangeably.

The post-gay spaces in Belgrade, I argue, welcome a specific kind of non-heterosexual women[5], who go out almost exclusively to gay-friendly alternative clubs in question, rarely attending official LGBT parties. This, as I will show in Chapter 4, originates from their personal feeling of belonging to post-gay spaces of alternative nightclubs in Belgrade which rests on parameter of common middle-class background. Furthermore, all of these women share what I understand as post-gay identity.

In scholarship so far the term "post-gay" has been vaguely defined. One the one hand, it has been used as a term referring to the rejection of sexual self-identification (Collard, 1998; Russel, Clarke and Clary, 2011; Nash, 2013b).On the other hand, it was equated with the "normalization" of LGBT community (Warner, 2000), namely it was understood as a synonym for "homonormative" (Ghaziani, 2011, Nash 2013b). Hence, post-gay was understood as a new gay identity that became depoliticized due to its alliance with the discourse of heteronormativity, i.e. through the adoption of the values of the heteronormative society such as respecting the

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[5] "Non-heterosexual" or "non-straight" is a term that I use to refer to women engaging in same-sex relationships (either exclusively or not) who go out to the alternative gay-friendly social scene in Belgrade. I use the term "non-heterosexual" instead of lesbian or bisexual mainly because most of my interviewees refused to identify themselves according to their sexual orientation, thereby rejecting the categorization of themselves as either lesbian, bisexual, queer, etc.

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private/ public division in which sex is relegated to the private domain and tied to monogamous loving relationships and consequently, marriage (Richardson 2005, p. 522; Warner, 2000, p. 36, Seidman, 2002, p. 133).

However, I would like to invest in the possibility of redefining the term "post-gay" in order to fill the discrepancies rising from the gap between the term homonormative and post-gay. As I will show in Chapter 2, I peruse the term "post-gay" as a reference to the space and the identities of non-heterosexual women occupying this space, that although are normalized and homonormative to a certain extent, still allow for transgressions of homonormativity. As I will argue in Chapter 4, post-gay female identity in the context of Belgrade supposes the renouncing of self-identification based on sexual orientation. Furthermore, it also indicates respecting the public/private boundary, i.e. espousing the values of respectability in which sex remains tied to the private sphere. Therefore, the public expression of homoerotic desire in post-gay spaces is brought down to the minimum of occasional kissing and holding hands. However, at the same time post-gay space offers a potential for transgression of the normalizing discourse (Warner, 2000), i.e. the homonormativity (Duggan, 2002; Richardson, 2006). Namely, some of the post-gay women in post-gay spaces – mainly androgynous and butch women – show their non-alignment with homonormative requirements of performing the "right" gender (Warner, 2000, p. 37). Other women refuse to submit to the normalizing discourse of striving towards monogamous loving relationships by engaging in group sex or changing multiple partners during one night. In this sense, post-gay identity in contemporary Belgrade, contrary to Warner's claims (2000, p. 62) offers a possibility for queer affirmations through not adhering to the gender norms and the disavowal of monogamous intimate relationships. Due to the scope of this paper, I have chosen to focus exclusively on the specific non-heterosexual *female* identities and their

belonging to these post-gay spaces. Therefore, I leave the research on non-heterosexual men in Belgrade post-gay spaces and the possible parallels or differences from female belonging to other researchers.

I begin by presenting an overview of the scholarship written on the topic and discussing the key terms I will make use of in my analysis to describe the alternative scene in Belgrade and non-heterosexual women attending it: "post-gay" and "homonormative." First, I give an overview of the way these terms have been used and defined in the academic scholarship. Furthermore, I offer my own reinterpretation of the term "post-gay" and analyze its overlapping with and divergences from the notion of homonormativity as it has been defined by Duggan (2002) and discussed by Richardson (2005). I then proceed to discuss the differences between LGBT/ queer spaces and alternative gay-friendly spaces in Belgrade, which I read as "post-gay" spaces. Finally, in Chapter 4 I analyze the aspect of belonging of certain non-heterosexual women to these post-gay/ gay-friendly alternative nightclubs. I focus on the differences they see between themselves and the women attending exclusively LGBT venues, in other words the differences they see between post-gay spaces and LGBT spaces. In the same chapter, I discuss relationship between female post-gay identities and the discourse of homonormativity, arguing that although post-gay women in post-gay spaces meet certain homonormative requirements, they, at the same time, produce significant ruptures in homonormative regimes.

2. Situating the research

2.1. Sexuality and space: sexual geographies

This paper is a contribution to the bourgeoning scholarship on geographies of sexualities that focuses on the relationship between sexuality and space, i.e. on the way sexuality of subjects constructs the space (as heterosexual, homosexual, queer, homonormative, etc). Until recently, scholarship on sexual geographies has been focusing on the naturalization of space as heterosexual and consequently on the production of LGBT space as a resistance to heterosexual space (see for example Bell, 1991, Valentine 1993a,1993b; Valentine & Skelton, 2003), which in turn supposed a binary approach, according to which, space can be either heterosexual or homosexual (LGBT). Furthermore, LGBT space has been understood as transgressive of heteronormativity, and it was consequently identified with queer space (Bell and Binnie, 1994; Binnie, 1995; Rushbrook, 2002; Podmore, 2006; Podmore, 2013). As a result, binaries have been built between on the one side heterosexual/ heteronormative space and, on the other side, LGBT/ queer space.

However, in recent scholarship, the equation between queer space and LGBT space and the consequent binary division between heterosexual and queer space was problematized on the grounds of intersectionality. Namely, scholars advocating intersectional approach to geography of sexualities argued for the inclusion of the parameters of race and class into the homosexual/ heterosexual space binary (see Oswin, 2008; Browne, 2006; Brown, 2012). More specifically, scholars of intersectionality suggested that both race and class belonging play a major role in the societal acceptance of the homosexual subject. This means that, for instance, as Nash (2013b) demonstrated on the example of Toronto, that privileged white middle-class homosexual has access to spaces that black working-class homosexual does not. Along this line, Oswin (2008)

critiqued the lack of intersectional approach to queer space, in which "queer space" has been conceptualized solely on the basis of sexual non-normativity and the parameters of race and class have gone unacknowledged. Namely, Oswin follows in the footsteps of Puar (2007), who examined how in the aftermath of 9/11 the homonationalist discourse in the USA subsumed the "respectable gays" as "us", in turn casting away the Muslims as the new queer Other. In line with what Puar (2007) argued, Oswin concurs that the queer Other does not necessarily have to be a homosexual Other, but that it can also be a heterosexual racialized Other.

As a consequence, the term queer space has been disentangled from the notion of LGBT space. Namely, Oswin argued that although LGBT space, if transgressive of homonormativity, can be equated to the queer space, it does not necessarily have to be one. This is because, she argues, the LGBT space can exist *within* the boundaries of homonormativity, for instance in the case when it belongs to white middle-class "respectable" gay people. On the other hand, Oswin (2008) argues that queer spaces are not only spaces of sexual non-normativity, but that they can also be spaces of working-class and race outcasts (also see Cohen, 1997). As a result, she disentangles the notion "queer" from LGBT, proposing a more fruitful differentiation between hetero/homonormative spaces and queer spaces instead of heterosexual vs queer/ LGBT division.

In the light of what Oswin argued for, studies that analyzed LGBT spaces as homonormative spaces (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Nash, 2013a; Gorman-Murray & Waitt, 2009) have appeared as well as studies that broke through the homosexual/ heterosexual binary by pointing towards the phenomenon of post-gay space (Visser, 2008, Brown, 2006, Nash, 2013b). However, research on homonormative LGBT spaces and post-gay spaces has so far been done almost exclusively in the context of neoliberal Global North countries, such as Canada (Nash, 2013a, Nash, 2013b), Great Britain (Brown, 2006; Browne and Bakshi, 2013) and Australia

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(Gorman-Murray & Waitt, 2009). The only exception to the overwhelming research on Global North urban centers might be Visser's (2008) research on post-gay spaces in South Africa (Visser, 2008). However, although South Africa is not considered as a neoliberal Global North country, what it has in common with other Global North countries in question is that it grants the LGBT community the right to marry and therefore, like UK, USA or Canada, it recognizes the LGBT minority in terms of sexual citizenship.

Therefore, research on the acceptance of non-heterosexual women outside of LGBT context in a country otherized as not European enough, where LGBT community does not enjoy any rights of citizenship is highly important as a contrasting point to researches on post-gay spaces and homonormative lifestyles in neoliberal Global North societies. It is crucial to draw attention to the fact that the implications of the existence of gay-friendly/ post-gay spaces in the context of Belgrade, where gay marriage is not legalized and where civil unions or even safe Pride Parades cannot take place, cannot be equated to the implications of the existence of gay-friendly places in the context of neoliberal countries in which LGBT community is protected and given rights to enter into civil unions and marriages. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, unlike in the case of Global North urban centers, Belgrade does not have queer neighborhoods. Even more, there are only two regularly open LGBT clubs and a handful of LGBT cafes. Consequently, the rapid emergence of a small but significant number of gay-friendly places where "Belgrade becomes Berlin" ("Hedofer: Beograd", 2014; "Italijanska štampa, 2014) in an otherwise LGBT-hostile environment carries a greater subversive potential than, for instance, the existence of post-gay spaces in the context of London (Brown, 2006) where, unlike in Belgrade, the LGBT minority is equal to heterosexuals in terms of sexual citizenship and where the public

expression of homoerotic desire is accepted in public spaces such as streets, schools and workplaces.

2.2. Conceptualizing "post-gay" and "homonormative"

As this research is situated within a broader framework of queer theory, it rests on the theories of "post-gay" identities and "post-gay" spaces, discussed by Collard (1998), Warner (2000), Brown (2006), Ghaziani (2011), Russel, Clarke and Clary (2011)and Nash (2013b). On the other hand, it relies on the notions of normalization of gay community (Warner, 2000) and consequently, the conceptualizations of homonormativity discussed by Duggan (2002), Richardson (2005) and Puar (2007). Namely, my aim is to reconsider the heretofore vaguely used term "post-gay" and, in this new light, analyze the overlapping and discrepancies between the "post-gay" discourse and homonormative discourse.

The term "post-gay" has for the first time been used in 1994 by British journalist and gay activist Paul Burston (Collard, 1998), but has gained more popularity since the infamous James Collard's article was published in the magazine *Out* in 1998 under the title "Leaving the gay ghetto". In the article, Collard calls for a new "post-gay sensibility", which according to him, supposes embracing of a lifestyle in which one's own sexual orientation stops being a relevant marker of one's identity, or – quoting Collard – "we (gays) should no longer define ourselves solely in terms of our sexuality – even if our opponents do" (Collard, 1998). Namely, according to Collard (1998), the post-gay sensibility denotes the ending of the separation between the space of the "gay ghetto" and the space of the "straight world". As a consequence, "post-gay" sensibility postulates the merging of gay and straight spaces into a gay-friendly conglomerate. At the same time, by arguing for a post-gay sensibility in which non-heterosexual orientation stops

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functioning as a primary marker of one's identity, Collard (1998) advocates moving away from the political struggles of the LGBT minority. It was in the same article that he infamously stated that "there are many gay people who no longer see their lives solely in terms of struggle" (Collard 1998, p. 53). In other words, Collard (1998) proposes "leaving the gay ghetto" which, according to him, can be achieved through the merging between gay and straight spaces.

Collard's advocacy for a post-gay sensibility has been criticized by Warner (2000), who uses Collard's text as an example of the discourse of "normalization" of gay people. According to Warner, the discourse of normalization is the discourse in which the gays that respect the codes of respectability and do not "flaunt [their] sex and [their] faggotry" (Warner, 2000, p. 32) are seen as dignified members of the community, as "respectable" as their heterosexual counterparts. Therefore, Warner argues, in the discourse of normalization, the "respectable" gays, i.e. "post-gays" are no more shamed for being gay. Consequently, the shame is being passed exclusively to "undignified" queer gays: those who transgress the norms of respectability and make their homosexuality visible in public spaces by, for example, having public sex, being too vocal about their sexuality or by challenging the gender norms (Warner, 2000, p. 37). Therefore, unlike the "dignified gay", i.e. unlike Collard's (1998) post-gay who "who no longer see their lives solely in terms of struggle" (p.53), the queers are, by virtue of being transgressors of norms, always in a struggle with heteronormative, i.e. homonormative regimes.

After Collard's article (1998) and Warner's (2000) criticism, the term post-gay has been recycled and used in different ways. Brown (2006), who borrowed Collard's term to talk of "post-gay" space, defines post-gay space as a site in which the inhabitants are mostly heterosexual, yet where LGBT people are still visible. More precisely, according to him, post-gay space is that space "where sexual difference is visible and acknowledged without being the central marker of the space (2006, p. 133). In this sense, Brown's conceptualization of post-gay space echoes Collard's

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call for a post-gay sensibility which rests on the merging of gay and straight spaces: "For me, the post-gay sensibility began when I realized that I preferred the social variety of "mixed" clubs to the more homogenous gay clubs" (Collard 1998, p. 54).

Ghaziani (2011) also drew on Collard's (1998) concept of post-gay to talk about a "post-gay era", which – according to him – is an era of inclusion, in which *us* (the gays) are united with *them* (the straights) (p. 101). In a post-gay era, Ghaziani states, activists "are motivated less by drawing boundaries against members of the dominant group and more by building bridges towards them" (p. 101). Consequently, Ghaziani's understanding of the term "post-gay" is in accordance with Warner's criticism of the notion "post-gay". Namely, like Warner, Ghaziani equates the post-gay discourse with the discourse of normalization of gay community propagated by LGBT movement in the context of the USA.

Russel, Clarke and Clary (2011) used the term "post-gay" in a different light, as a reference to non-heterosexual individuals who either choose not to categorize themselves according to their sexual orientation or to those who embrace sexual identities other than LGBT, such as "sexually fluid", "pansexual", "open", etc. On the one hand, Russel, Clarke and Clary's (2011) understanding of the term "post-gay" ignores Collard's (1998) calls for the termination of political struggle and the ending of separation between gay and straight spaces. On the other hand, their conceptualization of "post-gay" relies partially on Collard's (1998) argument that being "post-gay" means that sexual orientation of an individual does no more function as a significant marker of their identity.

Finally, Nash (2013b) used the term post-gay to talk about emerging alternative subjectivities and spaces in sexual geographies in the context of Toronto, Canada. Relying on the previous scholarship (Brown, 2006; Warner, 2000), Nash (2013b) understands post-gay

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subjectivities as postmodern subjectivities: those non-heterosexual individuals that decided to abandon LGBT spaces, pride parades and that refuse to define themselves according to their sexual orientation (p. 243).

All in all, the term "post-gay" has so far been vaguely defined. It has been used as a term referring to abandoning of sexual identity categories (Collard, 1998; Russel, Clarke and Clary, 2011; Nash, 2013b) and as a descriptive term for spaces accommodating both straight and gay people (Collard, 1998; Brown, 2011; Nash, 2013b). At the same time, it was also perceived as a term referring to the era of normalization of LGBT community (Warner, 2000; Ghaziani, 2011), which suggests the merging of post-gay discourse with the discourse of homonormativity. In this vein, I would like to bring similarities and differences between the notion of "post-gay" and what in academic literature has been understood under the term of "homonormativity" to the fore.

Homonormativity is a term originally coined by Lisa Duggan (2002), who used it to describe the early 2000s politics of the gay movement in the USA. According to Duggan (2002), homonormativity functions as the sexual politics of neoliberalism. It is "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (p. 179).

First of all, when Duggan claims that homonormativity becomes a sexual politics of neoliberalism, she understands neoliberalism the same way Richardson (2005) does – as cultural rather than economic politics. As Richardson (2005) states, what is common to both neoliberalism and the politics of homonormativity is "a concern with the self-producing self-regulating subject… suggesting that (good) citizenship is increasingly constituted through the voluntary governance of the self" (p. 518).Writing on the connections between homonormativity

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and neoliberalism, Gavin Brown (2006) affirms that cultural politics of neoliberalism promotes "personal responsibility and individual autonomy through supposed free choice" (p. 1066).Therefore, in the discourse of homonormativity, gay community is not *forced* to act in what Warner would call "normalized" way, i.e. according to the standards of society built on heteronormative premises. On the contrary, they *choose* to act "normal".

What then does it mean to have politics of homonormativity that, as Duggan (2002) says, "sustains… dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions" (p. 179)? Namely, homonormatity refers to the LGBT community's espousal of heteronormative values that they embrace in order to be perceived as "normal" and as equal to heterosexuals, and consequently, as integrated into the society as heterosexuals are (i.e. through obtaining access to the institutions of marriage and military). Warner (2000, pp. 24-5) has also noted that the gay movement "has turned into an instrument for normalizing gay men and lesbians". Although he did not use the term homonormativity at the time, he thoroughly described the process of normalization of gays and lesbians that has been taking place in neoliberal society of the USA since the 1990s.

Being "normal" and wanting to marry, for the LGBT community, supposed respecting the norms of heterosexual marriage, such as having intimate, loving, private sex and stable relationships (Richardson 2005, p. 522; Warner, 2000, p. 36, Seidman, 2002, p. 133). Furthermore, homonormative discourse has required that the gay individuals also look as "normal" as possible, i.e. fit the gender norms (Warner, 2000, p. 37) that do not disrupt the heterosexual discourse. In this way, the "normal" gays who fit into the gender norms and do not "flaunt their… faggotry" (Warner, 2000, p. 32) are seen as "respectable" and, as a consequence, accepted by the heteronormative society. Therefore, as Warner (2000) argues, since they act in accordance with the discourse of homonormativity, the "respectable" gays are not shamed for

being gay anymore. As I have noted earlier, the shame is then transferred to the queer transgressors of the codes of heteronormative sexuality, such as "the queers who have sex in public toilets, who don't "come out" as happily gay, the sex workers, the lesbians who are too vocal about a taste for dildos or S/M, the boys who flaunt it as pansies or as leathermen, the androgynes, the trannies or transgendered" (Warner, 2000: p. 66).

The other facet of homonormative discourse in the context of the USA supposed that the new homonormative gay, as any other "respectable" and "proper" American, would cater to the national interests of their country. This, in turn, helped turn the tables in the process of "otherizing". The new Other became the "(principally Muslim) other deemed to be opposed to liberal social values within the national borders" (Brown, 2006, p. 1066). This kind of conceptualization of homonormativity has been developed by Puar (2007) who coined the term "homonationalism" in order to refer to the nationalist project of subsuming the (white, middle-class) LGBT community under the banner of the American nation in the "fight against the terrorism", which in turn shifted the focus from the otherizing of the sexually "deviant" one (i.e. the homosexual) to the otherizing of the religiously and racially "deviant" terrorist – the Muslim Other.

The discourse of homonormativity has been criticized on myriad grounds, one of them being the fact that it has served its purpose in creating a new Other, conceptualized as a sexually queer Other by Warner (2000) or as a racially/ religiously queer Muslim/ Terrorist Other by Puar (2007). Nevertheless, one of the key points of the critique of homonormative discourse is the fact that it is complicit with what Duggan (2002) called "a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture" (p. 179). In other words, according to the discourse of homonormativity, once the LGBT community is granted the same rights to citizenship that the

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heterosexuals have, there will be no more need for political struggle. As Warner (2000) states, "the embrace of normal is also a prime example of antipolitical politics. The point of being normal is to blend, to have no visible difference and no conflict" (p. 60).

How then to make sense of the convergence and divergence between post-gay identity and homonormative discourse? Warner (2000) has equated Collard's (1998) notion of post-gay sensibility with the project of the normalization of gay community. As a consequence this leads to the equation between being "post-gay" and being "homonormative". Other authors, such as Ghaziani (2011) and Nash (2013b) also suggest that being post-gay supposes adhering to the homonormative discourse. Nevertheless, I am not using the term post-gay and homonormative interchangeably. Although I admit that post-gay identities in many ways fit into the homonormative discourse, I also argue that post-gay identity at the same time deviates from the homonormative discourse and offers potential for queer affirmations. Therefore, in the following paragraphs I will briefly explain what the main differences I see between the notion "post-gay" and the concept of "homonormativity" are and in what ways I will be making use of them in my analysis.

First of all, although I concur with Warner (2000) that post-gay might refer to the normalization of the *gay* individual, i.e. the individuals who claim not to base their identity on their sexual orientation, I argue that the term "post-gay" also insinuates moving *beyond* considering sexuality as an identity marker, hence defining oneself as gay, and therefore suggests distancing of the post-gay discourse from the LGBT politics of homonormativity. Therefore, in light what Collard (1998), Russel, Clarke and Clary (2011) and Nash (2013b) suggested, I am also using the term "post-gay" in order to gesture to the non-heterosexual subject who repudiates sexual categorization altogether. This kind of conceptualization of post-gay identity, which is

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establish upon the repudiation of sexual categorization, is at odds with homonormativity, which is a discourse created by gay community in order to re-invent the gay community as "normal". Therefore, to be post-gay, in this sense, does not mean being a normalized *gay* person. To be post-gay in this sense is to claim to be beyond gay, it is neither to identify oneself according to the categories of sexual orientation nor to affiliate oneself with the politics of the official LGBT movements.

Nevertheless, as I have already mentioned, post-gay identity does fit into the homonormative discourse in the case when it refers to certain aspects of "normalization" of the non-heterosexual individual. Namely, post-gay subjects indeed do not want to be too vocal regarding their non-heterosexuality (Warner, 2000, p. 62) In this case, much like the homonormative subject, the post-gay can be seen as the opposite of the queer subject, who purposefully breaks norms of heteronormative society (Warner, 2000, p. 66-67). However, as I will show in Chapter 4, being post-gay in the context of Belgrade also allows for ruptures in the normalizing homonormative discourse by virtue of offering the possibility for queer affirmations through the breaking of gender roles (Warner, 2000, p. 66) and through transgressions of the homonormative requirements of engaging in loving monogamous relationships (Richardson 2005, p. 522; Warner, 2000, p. 36, Seidman, 2002, p. 133). As I will argue in further chapters, some of the post-gay women in post-gay alternative scene appropriate the butch aesthetics, thereby transgressing the gender stereotypes, while other women cruise post-gay spaces in search of partners for group sex and consequently rupture the homonormative ideals of monogamy.

Finally, besides using the notion "post-gay" as reference to female non-heterosexual identities, I will employ the same term as a reference to space of alternative nightclubs which these non-heterosexual post-gay women attend. Therefore, in accordance with Brown's (2006)

conceptualization of the term, I will use the notion of "post-gay" space to refer to those spaces difference does not function as the marker of the space.

2.3. Methodology

For this research I conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews using the snowball sample method with non-heterosexual women between the age of 20 and 40, who regularly or occasionally visit alternative gay-friendly late-night bars and clubs in Belgrade. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 2 hours and covered four main topics. Namely, I talked to my interviewees about 1) their personal sexual identification, 2) their experiences in alternative gay-friendly clubs regarding public expression of homoerotic desire, 3) their thoughts on the similarities and the differences between LGBT and alternative gay-friendly clubs and 4) their opinion on the relationship between gay-friendly scene in Belgrade and the hipster subculture.

Since I consider myself a member of LGBT community in Serbia, during the past years I have been actively attending LGBT venues in Serbia and formed strong bonds with a number of non-heterosexual and LGBT women in Belgrade both through LGBT social scene as well as through social networks and private parties. Consequently, my interviewees saw me as an ally and therefore were not hesitant to share their experiences with me.

Furthermore, a part of my field-research also consisted of participant observation. With the help of a gatekeeper – my lesbian friend who revealed to me the existence of Belgrade gay-friendly scene in the first place – I had gathered information about gay-friendly venues in Belgrade and had access to non-heterosexual women who go out to these places. The first aim of my participant observation was to discover to what degree non-heterosexual women openly exhibit their homoerotic desire in alternative gay-friendly venues through practices such as

kissing and touching, and how this kind of behavior is perceived by others, presumably heterosexual, guests. The second goal was to assess the visual signifiers of women who were present at these places, i.e. to discover whether these non-heterosexual women were practicing femininity or masculinity in terms of looks and clothing, whether there were butch and androgynous women who transgress gender norms were present. Furthermore, the casual conversations I had with these women helped me reach unexpected conclusions (discussed in Chapter 3) regarding their personal views on and practices of intimate relationships, sex and monogamy, that proved to be yet another niche promising the possibility of queer affirmations within the post-gay spaces in Belgrade.

3. Alternative "gay-friendly" social scene: an introduction

I use the term "alternative social scene" to refer to a small but significant number of nightclubs and late-night bars scattered around the city of Belgrade, but mainly pertaining to the so-called area of *Savamala* located on the banks of Sava river. Designating these clubs as *alternative* is a term of my choice, which I will clarify in the following paragraphs.

The term "alternative", in the sense I am using it, does not imply that these clubs and bars are underground in any way, that is to say – accessible to a narrow circle of clientele and consequently invisible to a larger audience. On the contrary, they occupy visible locations in downtown Belgrade and can be accessed by any passer-by. For example, a recent article published in free daily newspaper distributed in Belgrade *24 sata* (DUM-AK, 2015), which reaches a large number of urban Belgrade population, publicized "ten best café gardens" in Belgrade. Strikingly, out of ten places enlisted, eight are known to be "gay-friendly" cafes, as my interviewees have confirmed.

The same amount of publicity is also given to alternative gay-friendly nightclubs and late-night bars, which are being advertised on popular websites promoting Belgrade social scene such as www.urbanbug.net and www.belgradian.com. Talking about alternative social scene in Belgrade, Eva, one of my interviewees, pinpointed: "These venues and clubs are not hidden, after all they are visible both in public and in media." In short, the alternative gay-friendly cafes and late-night clubs and bars in Belgrade are in no way secluded. As a consequence, I am not using the term "alternative" as a synonym for "underground" or "invisible".[6] Rather, I am employing it to refer to those clubs and late-night bars that exist as an alternative to the

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[6] Moreover, I am not using the term alternative with regard to anarchist/ leftist spaces that emerged in opposition to capitalist consumption practices, such as Christiania in Copenhagen or Kreuzberg in West Berlin in the 70s. Contrary to anarchist/ leftist alternative places, the alternative scene in Belgrade is a space pertaining to middle-class subjects, deeply embedded in the practices and the discourse of consumerism.

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overwhelming majority of Belgrade nightclubs offering "music for the masses", such as Serbian *turbo-folk* music, American pop-music or mainstream house and electronic music.

3.1. A hipster hotspot

However, the term "alternative" in this sense is too broad and could potentially refer to any venue where "non-mainstream" music, such as metal, gothic or punk music is played and where respective subcultures gather. Therefore, I am narrowing the term "alternative scene" to refer to the cafes and nightclubs that offer their visitors independent pop, rock or electronic music oftentimes represented by singer-songwriter artists. In a sense, what I understand under the term "alternative" is that which the outside observer would put under the umbrella-term of "hipster subculture". A good example of outsider's understanding of the alternative social scene was disclosed to me by Sandra, a lesbian woman who does not visit alternative places as a guest, yet is familiar with them as a result of her job requirements. Namely, during our interview, she used pejoratively the term "hipster brood" to refer to the people gathering at the alternative social scene.

While I was still an outsider to these places, I also referred to the visitors of these clubs as "hipsters". Therefore, my original idea was to name this social scene a "hipster" alternative social scene. However labeling this scene as "hipster" proved to be problematic. First of all, the term "hipster" is an understudied notion in social sciences, and therefore proves to be a vague term with a complicated history. In brief, the term hipster was originally used to designate black subculture of the 1940s. Namely, since the white race had been limiting the black race from accessing the forms of white knowledge, the emergence of black hipster subculture signaled a desire to reappropriate the power over knowledge by demonstrating the possession of "black"

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knowledge not available to the white race (Greif, 2010, Positions section). Nevertheless, the term "hipster" soon began to be used as a reference to the white subculture of the 1950s that aspired to "disaffiliate from whiteness, and achieve the "cool" knowledge and exoticized energy, and lust, and violence, of black Americans" (Greif, 2010, Positions section).

Nowadays, the term "hipster" refers more or less to young middle-class people who follow certain fashion trends and are therefore visually recognizable for wearing showy items of clothing, such as old-school sweaters, colorful jeans, eyewear with large frames and hip haircuts. Moreover, hipsters are ideally fans of independent pictures, independent music or in other words – everything that they think is not mainstream. For instance, according to Lanham (2003), some of the crucial features of a hipster are dressing creatively, disdaining the corporate world, giving importance to music and listening to independent artists, supporting the political left and promoting individual values, ergo not admitting to being a hipster (Core Elements of Hipsterdom section). Consequently, what links the 1940s black hipster to the contemporary urban hipster subculture is the insistence on possessing the "independent" knowledge inaccessible to the mainstream society (Grief, 2010, Positions section).

As Lanham (2003) noted, the contemporary hipster subculture is inclined towards leftist politics and the promotion of values of human rights and environmentalism (Core Elements of Hipsterdom section). Consequently, hipsters have been also connected to the LGBT community. Furthermore, the merging between the hipster subculture and LGBT community has been confirmed in recent academic literature. Nash (2013a) uses the term "homohipster" to refer to participants of the queer neighborhood in Toronto, usually white, young, male and middle-class people who are drawn to it because of its "artistic and social 'edginess'" (p. 211). The term homohipster, therefore, can acquire double meaning: it can refer to the middle-class LGBT

individuals who belong to the hipster subculture, but it can also refer to heterosexuals who go to queer events in search of the non-mainstream artistic atmosphere and social edginess .

The gay-friendly alternative social scene in Belgrade became a home to a large number of "homohipsters" both male and female. However, not all people attending these venues could be, at least visually, recognized as members of the hipster subculture. Although vintage sweaters and handcrafted jewelry are inseparable part of some of the guests' outfits, other visitors are dressed in mainstream inconspicuous middle-class brands. As Bojana, one of my interviewees, noticed: "Although the most of people who go out to these alternative places *are* indeed hipsters, I would not call these places 'hipster' places, because I think that the people are so mixed up and that alternative places welcome also people who are not hipsters".

Furthermore, many of my interviewees who more or less fit the "hipster" description and who regularly attend the alternative places in question, felt uncomfortable with me categorizing them as hipsters, which is analogous to Lanham's (2003) claim that hipsters refuse to identify as hipsters (Core Elements of Hipsterdom section) because they put emphasis on individualism. When I asked what the word "hipster" means for them and why they felt uncomfortable being called "hipsters", a couple of my interviewees visually recognizable as hipsters confirmed Lanham's (2003) hypothesis, stating that they renounce the term "hipster" due to the fact they perceive this labeling as a way of forced categorization which robs them of their individuality and uniqueness. As Milena, one of my interviewees stated: "We probably take it negatively because the hipsters *are* the mainstream now and we do not want to be mainstream, we do not want to be confined to any category."

Moreover, many of my interviewees – both those visually discernible and not discernible as hipsters – shared the stance that the reason the word "hipster" resonates pejoratively is

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because being a "hipster" has acquired a negative meaning and refers to the people who follow the fashion or music trends just for the sake of following them. According to Milica, one of my interviewees, "hipsters are those people that without any criteria assume the readymade models, which indeed is not alternative... It's a consumer model, where you put yourself in a specific consumer drawer through your dressing or listening to a certain type of music."

In conclusion, the gay-friendly alternative scene in Belgrade is marked by strong presence of "hipsters" and this is what, for the outside observer, would differentiate it from other alternative clubs and subcultures in Belgrade, such as rock, punk, metal or gothic subculture. However, the vagueness of the term "hipster", the fact that the gay-friendly alternative scene is welcoming both people visually recognizable as "hipsters" and those who are not discernible as such, together with the fact that my interviewees largely refused to identify themselves as "hipsters" were the deciding factors due to which I decided not to refer to this social scene as a "hipster" scene. Instead, in the following chapters, I will be referring to the alternative gay-friendly scene as "alternative" only.

3. 2. Alternative gay-friendly social scene vs LGBT social scene

Alternative social scene in Belgrade in question is not only the "hipster" alternative to mainstream turbo-folk nightclubs. As a gay-friendly scene, it also stands as the alternative to the LGBT clubs and bars in Belgrade.

First of all, it is crucial to define what "gay-friendly" social scene in the context of Belgrade is. Namely, Belgrade does not possess the so-called "queer" neighborhoods or even "queer-friendly" neighborhoods, that have so far been researched mostly in the context of Global North societies in the cities such as Toronto (Nash, 2013a; Nash, 2013b), Montreal (Podmore,

2008) and Manchester (Pritchard, Morgan & Sedgley, 2002). As I have noted in Chapter 2, the scholarship on sexual geographies so far has collapsed the queer space with the LGBT space. As a consequence, the articles written on queer geography in the context of Global North societies discuss the so-called "queer neighborhoods", i.e. geographically demarcated LGBT or LGBT-friendly social scenes or residential areas populated by a significant number of gay people (Browne and Bakshi, 2011; Valentine & Skelton, 2003), usually located in a specific city area that bears visible signs of being "gay-friendly", such as for instance the rainbow flags. Belgrade, as I have noted, does not possess a queer neighborhood – neither a gay residential area nor a geographically demarcated LGBT/ LGBT-friendly space consisting of cafes and bars grouped together. Although it is true that most of alternative gay-friendly clubs are to be found in the area of *Savamala,* the *Savamala* area is also a home to many other non-LGBT friendly cafes and clubs. Therefore, to speak of the alternative gay-friendly social scene in the context of Belgrade is to speak of a handful of LGBT-friendly alternative clubs, bars and cafes scattered around the city.

In addition, the gay-friendly clubs, bars and cafes in Belgrade bear no visible signs of being "gay-friendly", such as the rainbow flags that can be found in Soho area of London, Chueca neighborhood in Madrid or the gay-village in Manchester. Consequently, the gay-friendly venues in Belgrade are known to be gay-friendly by a word of mouth. Therefore, although the visibility of the alternative places allows access to any passer-by, the knowledge about gay-friendliness is available only to those people who are familiar with the venues and people going out there. As Nash (2013a) has shown on her investigation of queer neighborhoods in Toronto, venues can be considered queer-friendly, if not publicly advertised elsewhere, either because owners belong to the LGBT community, either because they have visibly queer

employees or a high number of queer users (p. 198). In the light of what Nash (2013a) argued, my interviewees claimed that they can tell an alternative place is gay-friendly because they either know the organizers or because they are familiar with the events or the people going out there.

Moreover, there are important contextual differences between the research done on queer neighborhoods in the urban centers of Global North, such as Canada, the US and Great Britain and the research on gay-friendly alternative social scene in the context of Serbia, which has been perceived as not European and not democratic enough (Kulpa, 2014; Kahlina, 2015). Namely, the Global North countries in question have brought many equality laws for LGBT community, including gay marriage. As a consequence, publicly showing same-sex desire in the context of urban environments in these countries should not bear any consequences – according to the law – regardless of the fact whether one engages in public expression of homoerotic desire on the street or any "heterosexual" café or bar. Consequently, although the LGBT/ LGBT-friendly neighborhoods in the urban centers of Toronto, Montreal and London contribute to the preservation of a sense of LGBT community, they do not anymore function as the only safe environment for LGBT community in these cities.[7]

Belgrade, as I have noted, does not possess a queer neighborhood, i.e. a geographically demarcated LGBT/ LGBT-friendly scene. It has two LGBT clubs, a couple of LGBT cafes and a handful of gay-friendly clubs and cafes scattered around the city. In short, the alternative gay-friendly social scene in Belgrade is embedded in the specific socio-political context of Serbia, which requires brief introduction. First of all, unlike the Global North countries that have been researched in terms of queer geographies (UK, USA, Canada), Serbia is not recognizing any type

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[7] It is crucial to highlight that I am not asserting that hate crimes do not take place in Global North societies and cities in question. I am merely indicating that LGBT minorities in Global North societies in question (Canada, USA, UK) are protected by law and that, in addition to this, the existence of queer neighborhoods and Pride Parades in these societies indicate that the LGBT minority is protected to a high degree, which is not the case in the context of Serbia.

of same-sex partnerships. Moreover, first anti-discrimination laws on the ground of sexual orientation have been brought up only in 2009 and after the insistence of EU which made it a "direct condition for lifting the visa requirement for Serbian citizens when travelling to EU" (Kahlina, 2015, p. 4). Nevertheless, despite the fact that anti-discrimination laws have been brought, open exhibition of same-sex desire in public spaces in Belgrade is oftentimes penalized. For example, in April 2015, the daily newspaper *24 sata* published a story about a young gay men being kicked out of a cab and punched by the cabdriver because he was commenting on the looks of another man (G.N., 2015).

Unlike gay men, lesbians – and especially heteronormatively-looking (i.e. feminine) lesbians – feel a higher degree of freedom in Belgrade when it comes to open exhibition of same-sex desire. A few of my interviewees claimed that they publicly hold hands on the streets of Belgrade, Bojana even stating that "it is not a problem being gay in Belgrade anymore". However, the tolerance of public expressions of female same-sex love also has its limits. Holding hands is allowed, presumably because it is not visually discernible as a sign of "lesbianism", but as close friendship. Nevertheless, once the holding of hands grows into an obvious demonstration of same-sex desire, such as public kissing which transgresses the codes of heteronormativity, women involved in it run the risk of being punished for their transgressions. Many of my interviewees have recounted me the stories of being warned about their behavior or kicked out cafes once they publicly kissed their girlfriends. In short, the mainstream social scene and public spaces in Belgrade are generally heteronormative, heterosexist, and therefore not welcoming towards the LGBT community.

As a consequence, talking about alternative gay-friendly venues in the context of Belgrade is in many ways distinct from talking about gay-friendly or queer neighborhoods in the

context of urban centers of Global North. It is because, first of all – the gay-friendly venues in Belgrade are not advertised as gay-friendly in public; rather, their "gay-friendliness" becomes known through word-of-mouth. The second reason is that, geographically speaking, the gay-friendly clubs and bars in Belgrade do not comprise one "gay-friendly" area. They are scattered in the city and exist neck-to-neck with other non-LGBT clubs. Finally, unlike in the urban centers of the previously mentioned Global North countries, the transgression of heteronormative sexuality in public places in Belgrade is likely to be punished either by verbal or physical harassment. Consequently, contrary to gay-friendly/ queer neighborhoods in the urban centers of the mentioned Global North countries, the alternative gay-friendly scene together with LGBT venues constitute the only public safe spaces for LGBT community in Belgrade.

3.2.1. LGBT social scene in Belgrade

The LGBT social scene in Belgrade has not been researched at all in academic literature. Nevertheless, since the official LGBT social scene is not my main focus, I will not investigate it in further detail, but I will briefly describe it so that I could draw out parallels between LGBT scene in Belgrade and alternative gay-friendly scene I am focusing on.

Belgrade, as a Serbian capital, is the key locus of gay events in Serbia.[8] First official LGBT clubs, as my interviewees have informed me, opened around 2003. At this moment, there are two official LGBT clubs in Belgrade, a couple of cafes and once a month public LGBT parties are organized at various venues.

Out of these two clubs, one – which I will name Turbo Gay Club – is known for offering "turbo-folk" and mainstream pop music and it is visited largely by working-class suburban

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[8] Novi Sad is another city that has one official public gay place. Nevertheless, gay cafes/ bars and clubs are inexistent in the rest of Serbia.

guests. The most frequent female visitors are young butch women and androgynous women, as well as transgender women. Furthermore, Turbo Gay Club is sexualized space where seeing people engaging in intense kissing and touching, as well as using the bathrooms as places for having sex is a common occurrence. Turbo Gay Club therefore proves to be a perfect example of what has in scholarship so far been defined as "queer space" – "the space of gays and lesbians or queers existing in opposition to and as transgressions of heterosexual space" (Oswin, 2008, p.89). Consequently, Turbo Gay Club ceases to be a heteronormative space by the mere fact that it welcomes non-heterosexual people who transgress the codes of proper sexual behavior in public. Since heteronormative sexual conduct supposes having loving, monogamous sex that takes place in private (Warner, 2000, p. 36), the proper heterosexual behavior in public would therefore suppose the minimal expression of sexual desire which, if shown, should be aimed at one partner. Nevertheless, in the queer space of Turbo Gay Club, men and women engage in intense sexual contact with multiple partners, while the center of the club is occupied by a strip-pole with dancing half-naked gay-men around it.

The other club – which I will refer to as Pop Gay Club – is known, on the one hand, for playing mainstream pop music, mainly female divas adored by the gay guests, such as Madonna, Britney Spears and Beyonce. As Jovana, one of my interviewees stated – "(Pop Gay Club) … is a kind of a middle road embraced by masses". Unlike in Turbo Gay Club, where the guests are mostly working-class and suburban, the visitors of Pop Gay Club varies from working-class to upper-middle class. However, much alike the space of Turbo Gay Club, the space in Pop Gay Club is highly sexualized: Pop Gay Club even has a separate room with couches, which is frequently used as a site for engaging in sexual intimacies.

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3.2.2. Alternative social scene in Belgrade

Alternative social scene in Belgrade is comprised of a number of cafes, bars and nightclubs, all of which my interviewees experience as gay-friendly. Nevertheless, I choose to focus on late-night bars and clubs that form part of the alternative social scene, since – unlike cafes – they at the same time serve the purpose of a "hookup scene", i.e. meeting place for a certain class of non-heterosexual women in Belgrade.

These alternative gay-friendly places also serve as an example of what Brown (2006) calls a post-gay space – "space… where sexual difference is visible and acknowledge without being the central marker of the space" (p. 133). Namely, Brown defines post-gay spaces as sites in which the clientele is mostly heterosexual, yet where LGBT people are still visible. Therefore, post-gay spaces become sites where sexual difference is accepted without it being the main marker of the space, as it is the case in queer spaces. One of the main differences between queer spaces and post-gay spaces, according to Brown (2006), is that in queer spaces the normative sexual and gender binaries are being consciously disrupted (p. 133), which is not the case in post-gay spaces. Unlike in queer spaces, the normative requirements of proper sexual conduct and gender roles are being fulfilled in post-gay spaces. Therefore, the post-gay spaces, according to Brown's definition, are constructed as homonormatively "respectable" places. This means that the post-gay space requires that both heterosexual and homosexual expressions of desire should be reduced to the minimum, to practices such as holding hands, hugging and occasional kissing.

In order to discover which alternative places in Belgrade count as gay-friendly, i.e. post-gay,[9] I asked my interviewees which venues they considered as gay-friendly. Besides a few cafes, my interviews generally agreed on the existence of four late-night bars and clubs that are

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[9] Due to the fact that amongst my interviewees the alternative social scene is perceived as a gay-friendly space, I will, depending on the context, refer to it using the designations "post-gay" and "gay-friendly" interchangeably.

welcoming towards non-heterosexual individuals. One of them, which I will call Urban Bar is a late-night bar, a hotspot for non-heterosexual women between the ages of 25 and 40. Another one, which I will refer to as CC, is a cultural center, which serves multiple purposes: it is a place where different kind of cultural events are held, it is a café during the day and during weekend nights it becomes a party venue. The last two venues, which I will refer to as NC1 and NC2 are nightclubs located on the banks of Sava River.

4. Non-heterosexual post-gay women in the alternative gay-friendly social scene

In this chapter I will construe the nature of post-gay spaces by intensifying my focus solely on women who proclaim to belong to these spaces. Consequently, I will center on specificities of non-heterosexual/ post-gay female identities which are present at the alternative social scene in Belgrade as well as on how they differ from their counterparts in LGBT clubs. I argue that non-heterosexual/ post-gay women attending Belgrade alternative social scene base their identity on their middle-class belonging rather than on their sexual orientation. This is the reason why they choose to socialize in the alternative social scene, which in Belgrade is a hotspot for middle-class urban people, rather than in the LGBT social scene, which mainly attracts LGBT people who want to socialize with other LGBT people. Furthermore, I argue that these middle-class non-heterosexual women in the post-gay scene appropriate the homonormative discourse to a certain degree, yet that at the same time, they transgress some of the homonormative requirements. They appropriate it in the sense that they submit to regulatory regime of the public/private distinction by behaving "respectably" in public places, abstaining from the non-conformist public display of sexual desire which, as I have previously argued, takes place in LGBT social scene. However, slightly departing from Ghaziani's (2011) and Nash's (2013b) discussions on post-gay identity, I argue that female post-gay identity does not entirely overlap with homonormativity. More specifically, I demonstrate that some of these post-gay women create significant ruptures in homonormative regimes by departing from homonormative requirements of performing the right gender (Warner, 2000, p. 66) and being in monogamous loving relationships (Richardson 2005, p. 522; Warner, 2000, p. 36; Seidman, 2002, p. 133).

It has been argued in scholarship that access to non-LGBT "post-gay" spaces is not offered to any LGBT individual, but rather that it is granted to a specific class of homonormative LGBT individuals, privileged in terms of race and class. For instance, Visser (2008) argues, on the example of Bloemfontein (South Africa), that certain elements – such as gender normativity (homonormativity), class and race belonging allow a certain class of gay men to participate in everyday straight places (p. 1346). By going out to straight places and openly showing homoerotic desire, Visser (2008) argues, these men are "gaying" the heterosexual spaces. Consequently, only a privileged set of gay men can participate in "gaying" of these heterosexual spaces. The same is argued by Browne and Bakshi (2011), who – through their anthropological research on LGBT people outside of LGBT scene in Britain – concluded that "certain 'gay' expressions and identities… are not confined to 'safe' gay/lesbian spaces" (p. 182). In accordance with Visser (2008), Browne and Bakshi (2011) conclude that the "gay expressions and identities" allowed in "straight" spaces are the ones that are homonormative and middle-class.

Although my approach to the alternative venues in Belgrade does not rely upon the notion of a straight space waiting to be gayed, but rather on the notion of a post-gay space (Brown, 2006), Visser's (2008) and Browne and Bakshi's (2011) conclusions on privileged access to non-LGBT spaces resonate with the conclusions I drew from my field research. Namely, the example of Belgrade post-gay space confirms that being a part of alternative gay-friendly/ post-gay scene rests on a special kind of privileges that non-heterosexual visitors of these clubs possess, such as the fact that they belong to middle-class, which – as I have noted in the Introduction chapter – is defined by their social and financial status, their educational

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background as well as in the taste they acquired as an extension of their class conditionings (Bourdieu, 1984).

Through my field research I discovered that non-heterosexual women going out to alternative social scene in Belgrade most often have a University Degree (preferably in arts/ humanities and social sciences), that they usually work as freelancers or have part-time jobs and are coming from a well-off family background. More than 60% of my interviewees were either students or have graduated/ done post-graduate studies in the fields such as languages, music, visual and drama arts and social sciences. A smaller number of them studied natural sciences, law and economy, while only one of my interviewees did not obtain a University Degree. Not surprisingly, despite the fact that she does not possess higher education, her profession is considered as a "creative" job: as a successful tattoo artist, she fits well into the creative hub of the alternative social scene in Belgrade.

All of my interviewees were non-heterosexual women familiar both with LGBT and alternative clubbing in Belgrade. All of them claimed that they regularly visit the gay-friendly alternative bars, nightclubs and cafes in Belgrade and have, at some occasion, with more or less frequency visited LGBT places. Yet, despite their personal sexual preferences, neither of the women I interviewed goes to LGBT places on a regular basis. Therefore, one of the key questions in interviews I conducted was related to the reasons these women are not part of the official LGBT scene in Belgrade. I would usually ask them the following: "Why do you choose to go out to these gay-friendly nightclubs instead of LGBT nightclubs? What is it that you don't like about LGBT clubs and on the other hand, what are the parameters of your identification with gay-friendly alternative scene and the people going out there?"

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As expected, the answers they provided revealed the traits that, on the one hand, bind them together and, on the other, separate them from non-heterosexual women who regularly attend LGBT nightclubs. The first trait that binds non-heterosexual women in the alternative scene is their belonging to the same cultural and social milieu of middle-class, which differentiates them from the guests attending LGBT clubs. As I have previously noted in Chapter 3, the guests in LGBT clubs belong either mainly to the working-class (in the case of Turbo Gay Club) or mixed classes (in the case of Pop Gay Club). The second trait that binds non-heterosexual women in the alternative social scene together is that they are embedded in the homonormative discourse of respectability to a higher extent than participants of LGBT events.

4.1. Non-heterosexual post-gay women: a privileged class

Non-heterosexual post-gay women in alternative social scene in Belgrade belong to the urban middle-class and, according to their testimonies, they prefer to mingle with the people of "their own". Middle-class belonging in the context of Belgrade, as I have already noted in the Introduction chapter, rests not only on the economic status of the individual, but also on the educational and social background, as well as on taste they acquired as an extension of their class conditionings (Bourdieu, 1984).

This means that belonging to the middle-class supposes not only earning a decent amount of money; it also means having obtained a University Degree, being interested in and knowledgeable about the "high culture" (i.e. non-mainstream and non-bestseller literature, music and visual arts) and consequently attending events related to these interests (such as going to the theatre and attending jazz and independent artists' concerts).

As I have previously stated, all but one of my interviewees either studied or have graduated from University. All of them, except for three 20 year old students, are either self-employed or work as freelancers. Nevertheless, as Jovana pinpointed, all of these women are in one way or another financially dependent on their parents: "We are all leaning on our parents for finances, this is really important. I know very few people who live completely independent from their parents; or – if they're financially independent, at least they have inherited an apartment, or they have influential parents who help them get jobs". Furthermore, their middle-class status is also implied by the fact all of them, except for two women I interviewed, live in central Belgrade districts.

When I inquired my interviewees about what they found appealing in alternative nightclubs in comparison with LGBT clubs, that is to say – why is it that they choose to go out to gay-friendly alternative places instead of LGBT clubs, the answer I predominantly got is that it is "because of the people who go there". Namely, these middle-class women think that it is more likely to find women similar to them (regarding their interests, educational background and social status) in alternative nightclubs than in LGBT nightclubs which welcome people with different lifestyles and interests, i.e. people belonging to different social milieus. In some cases even, for example in Turbo Gay Club, it is mostly working-class queer women that gather, i.e. women that are in terms of social and educational background and lifestyle more different than similar to the middle-class women in the alternative social scene. As a consequence, when going to one of these alternative gay-friendly clubs, non-heterosexual women know that they might meet other women with similar social and educational background, i.e. women belonging to the same class. In addition to this, many of my interviewees explicitly stated that they are aware of the class difference between visitors in alternative social scene and the visitors in LGBT social

scene. For example, Bojana, one of my interviewees, claimed that she sees a big gap in education and interests between women in the alternative scene with whom, she says, she can talk about art and design and women in the LGBT scene with whom, according to her, she can only discuss the reality TV shows. Therefore the reason these non-heterosexual women choose to go out to alternative social scene rather than LGBT social scene is because their criteria for choosing the social scene becomes not the sexual orientation of other guests, but rather their social and educational background. Consequently, this suggests that non-heterosexual women in question base their personal identities on their class-belonging rather than on their sexual orientation.

4.2. Defining post-gay female identity in the context of Belgrade

What I frequently encountered during my interviews was the fact that many interviewees indicated detachment from discourse of sexual identity and LGBT community, saying that they want the emphasis on the relationship between identity and sexuality to subside. In accordance with this, they explained their choice of alternative instead of LGBT clubs by arguing that they do not see sexuality as the driving force in their lives. Namely, they all agreed that people going out to LGBT clubbing come from different social, political and cultural backgrounds and that the thing binding them all together is their gay/ bisexual/ lesbian sexual orientation. Nevertheless, they claimed that their non-heterosexuality does not play that much of an important role in their life so as to impel them to move in strictly LGBT spaces. Sandra, one of my interviewees, briefly summarized this position: "I don't go out to LGBT places because I don't want to want to reduce my identity to that. In these places there are going to be 150 lesbians with whom all I have in common is the fact we are lesbians."

This suggests that non-heterosexual women in alternative nightclubs do not see their sexual orientation as a crucial part of their lives that would influence their other life choices, such as people they are friends with or places they go to. However, making this kind of choice is not only about having priorities in life, it also tells a lot about the importance of how one is being perceived. In LGBT clubs, one is always presumed to be a lesbian, while in alternative post-gay social scene, sexuality does not appear as a significant marker and, as a consequence, visitors are not being assessed according to their sexual orientation.

In this light, these women's identities can be defined as "post-gay" identities. The term "post-gay" was for the first time used in 1998 by James Collard, *Out* magazine editor, who claimed that "we should no longer define ourselves solely in terms of our sexuality—even if our opponents do" (p.53).Furthermore, Collard connected the post-gay sensibility to the new generation of gay people who decided to "leave the gay ghetto" because they "no longer see their lives in terms of struggle" (p. 53).Consequently, "post-gay" has been scrutinized in scholarship as identity marked by the adoption of respectability of heterosexual culture, and in that sense – as I have expounded in the Chapter 2 – post gay identity was equated with the homonormative discourse of normalization of the LGBT community (Warner, 2000; Ghaziani, 2011; Nash, 2013b). To be post-gay, in this "normalized" homonormative sense, is to be *included in* rather than excluded from the mainstream society; it is to represent oneself as more than just a gay/lesbian individual; it is to promote oneself as a "normal", common person as any other, it is to be moderately, "respectably" gay (Ghaziani, 2011).

Nevertheless, before proceeding to the discussion on how post-gay identities are embedded in the homonormative discourse of normalization, it is important to highlight that the equation between post-gay and homonormative discourse on the grounds of being "respectably

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gay" is precarious. On the one hand, the term "post-gay", as I use it, is in coherence with Ghaziani's (2011) conceptualization of the term according to which being post-gay means being "respectably *gay",* i.e. representing oneself as more than just a gay/lesbian individual (p. 102) – in other words, not putting sexual orientation as a relevant indicator of one's own identity. In this vein, a few of my interviewees who regularly attend post-gay social spaces stated that they consider themselves as lesbians, but at the same time, all of them quickly added that they do not think this category says anything relevant about themselves as individuals. Yet, it is more about practice in the sense that they simply express same-sex desire, or engage in same-sex practices. Therefore, this confirms the proposed linkage between post-gay identities and homonormativity on the grounds of the normalization of *gay* individual.

On the other hand, contrary to Ghaziani's (2011) and Warner's (2000) equation between the post-gay and the "respectable" *gay*, post-gay identity can also point at the embracing of sexual identities beyond gay/ lesbian identities, such as fluid, open, pansexual, etc. and as a reference for the disavowal of sexual identification altogether (Russel, Clarke and Clary, 2011)**.** Although – as I have stated – a few of my interviewees did identify as lesbians, most of them repudiated the sexual categorization altogether. In this sense, the term "post-gay" does not anymore refer to "respectable" *gays*; it refers to "respectable" *non-heterosexuals,* i.e. individuals who *do not define themselves* as gay, but rather see sexuality as a fluid concept. In this light, the concept "post-gay" must be disentangled from the politics of homonormativity which relies on the process of normalization as a way to reinvent the *gay* identity as "normal" and therefore equal to heterosexuals.

Nevertheless, what lesbians and women who choose not to identify with any category of sexual orientation have in common is that all of them, without exception, directly stated or

implied that they do not think their sexual preference/ sexual orientation is revealing anything relevant about themselves as persons, and that therefore they do not feel that it functions as a relevant marker of their identity. Therefore, I am using the term "post-gay" to refer both to lesbian-identified women who do not consider their sexual orientation as a relevant marker of their identity and to non-heterosexual women who reject categorization based on sexual orientation/preference.

4.3. Overlapping between post-gay and homonormative discourse

4.3.1 Moving beyond the "gay ghetto"

Following in the footsteps of Collard's (1998) argument for a post-gay sensibility that moves beyond the "gay ghetto", my interviewees disapproved of the separation between LGBT and "straight" clubs. A number of my interviewees have expressed their frustration with the idea of the separation of "gay" spaces from the "straight" spaces and therefore "gay" clubs from the "straight" clubs, arguing that this kind of separation constructs the LGBT community as "different" from heterosexuals. Milena, one of my interviewees, claimed that she disapproves of the existence of strictly LGBT clubs, arguing that they contribute to the creation of inequality between LGBT and straight individuals.

> I don't think it is healthy and normal … Now, it doesn't sound queer to say "healthy and normal", but on the other hand I think that making these kind of separations is not good. And like that (by going solely to LGBT clubs), you put yourself in a preserve, you hide yourself and therefore, you stigmatize yourself as if you were different in some way.

Furthermore, many of my interviewees used terms such as "basement", "dark places" or "mouse holes" to refer to LGBT clubs in Belgrade, suggesting– like Milena – that LGBT clubs in Belgrade serve the purpose of the "hiding places" for LGBT people. Rather than hiding in these "basements" or in, what Collard (1998) calls "gay ghetto", my interviewees argued for the inclusion of LGBT and non-heterosexual people in the community outside LGBT scene, i.e. for "leaving the gay ghetto" (Collard, 1998). This way, they claimed, the LGBT community can be seen not as different Other that has to hide in the basements, but as equal to heterosexuals.

This attitude, that many of my interviewees shared, again mimics the "post-gay" politics of inclusion, of building bridges towards the mainstream heterosexual community rather than relying on the tactics of separation (Ghaziani, 2011). In accordance with the homonormative politics of normalization of queer life (Warner, 2000, p. 80), my interviewees, like Milena, used adjectives such as "unhealthy" or "unproductive" to talk of this separation between straight and LGBT spheres and "normal" to argue for its merging together. As a consequence, the inclusion of gay people in the straight spaces becomes "normal", and – on the other hand, the separation is "unhealthy". Therefore, one of the most significant distinctive features that non-heterosexual women in alternative scene express and embrace is a high degree of homonormative normalization of gay life, according to which the struggles between the queer community and the heteronormative society become a distant past and a new era of inclusion of LGBT minority in the heteronormative society is awaiting in the near future, echoing what Lisa Duggan named "new homonormativity" (2002).

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4.3.2 "Respectable" post-gays vs "immoderate" queers

Before I began my field research, one of the crucial questions I needed to find an answer to was whether the public expression of homoerotic desire was allowed in the space of alternative gay-friendly nightclubs, and if so – to what degree. In order to assess the degree of acceptance of public expressions of homoeroticism in the alternative social scene, it was necessary to compare it to the public displays of homoeroticism in the LGBT social scene, which is considered a queer space where there are no limits in public displays of homoerotic desire.

According to my interviewees, the alternative places are as accepting as LGBT places of the public expression of homoerotic desire. Furthermore, all of my interviewees, except for Nevena and Sandra, claimed that they feel as free to publicly show their same-sex desire in alternative gay-friendly venues as they do in LGBT spaces. Nevertheless, even Nevena and Milena, who claimed they do not feel completely free to kiss or touch their girlfriends in alternative gay-friendly venues still believed that the environment in alternative clubs is tolerant towards public expressions of same-sex desire: "(We don't feel free) because it is something unconscious and has nothing to do with the surroundings… I don't feel free here (in Serbia)."

Nevertheless, despite my interviewees' claims that alternative and LGBT sites are equally tolerant towards public homoerotic practices, I have noticed important differences in the way non-heterosexual women behave in alternative venues in comparison with the women in LGBT nightclubs. LGBT clubs, which I have briefly described above, serve as an epitome of a queer space which creates ruptures in heteronormative regimes (Oswin, 2008, p. 89). With strip poles, separate rooms with couches and men naked bottoms up, LGBT clubs in Belgrade serve as an example of sexualized spaces where codes of heteronormativity, i.e. ideals of private, monogamous heterosexual loving sex are constantly being transgressed.

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Alternative clubs, on the other hand, are spaces much less sexualized than LGBT clubs; these are places where people act more in conformity with "proper" ways of behavior. The degree to which people openly exhibit their same-sex desire varies from club to club. However, even in the Urban Bar – where seeing women kissing and touching other women is a much more frequent occasion than, in let's say the CC venue, the amount and frequency of kissing and touching is still miles away from homoerotic scenes in LGBT clubs, where seeing two women heavily making out while touching each other's breasts and buttocks is a common occurrence. Una, who works as a bartender in an alternative club NC1 and simultaneously visits LGBT clubs, has had a chance to observe and compare people's behavior in both. Her conclusion is that public expression of homoerotic (as well as heterosexual) desire in LGBT clubs is more emphasized in comparison with gay-friendly alternative social scene: "I observe people in Turbo Gay Club and people do whatever they want, they climb the poles, they take off their clothes… Try doing that in Urban Bar. You can't because people go to Urban Bar to *pose,* to look cool."

In accordance with what Una conveyed, many of my interviewees recognized the difference in the sexualization of space in LGBT and alternative nightclubs. Along the lines of Una's argument, Milena also noticed that LGBT places are more sexualized than gay-friendly alternative clubs. Furthermore, her comparison is also qualitatively marked: the sexualization of LGBT places is seen by her as an "extreme", while the sexualization of gay-friendly alternative scene is in conformity with "norms of proper behavior":

> From my perspective, this (Turbo Gay Club) is a situation of a freak show… People are consummated there. What do I see there? Most often half-naked men, men who openly make-out and kiss. This is not a sexualized space, it is a space that goes to another extreme, it is consummation, and it's a trade what's going on

in there. On the other hand… in Urban Bar the norms of proper behavior are not transgressed. It's that subtle measure of behavior, you see people flirting, looking at each other.

The comments my interviewees made and their behavior in the alternative social scene suggest that the queer "immoderate" public exhibition of homoeroticism that takes place in LGBT social scene is not in compliance with their post-gay identities, i.e. it is something that they would feel uncomfortable engaging in any public place, whether it is an alternative gay-friendly bar or an LGBT club. In this respect, Jovana explicitly stated that she thinks she has not suffered any discrimination in Serbia exactly because she behaves in a "respectable" manner. Proud not to have been discriminated against in public, she explained to me that this is due to the fact she is not "rubbing on anyone's face" that she is gay. She then proceeded to give me an example of how she behaves in public: she holds hands with her girlfriend and occasionally gives her a peck on the lips, which she argues, is not "flaunting our homosexuality" but mere "expression of love for her girlfriend". Jovana's argument, therefore, is in accordance with the discourse of homonormativity, according to which "normal" sexuality is that one which is private, intimate and loving (Richardson 2005, p. 522; Warner, 2000, p. 36; Seidman, 2002, p. 133).

Moreover, the whole respectability discourse, as McClintock (1995) demonstrated on the example of society of Victorian England, has been historically tied to the middle-class which used it as an indicator of its own differentiation from the working-class, which has in turn been racialized as overly sexualized. As McClintock (1995) pinpoints: "working-class women were figured as biologically driven to lechery and excess; upper-class women were naturally indifferent to the deliriums of the flesh" (p. 86).

In the discourse of respectability, sexuality is tied to the private domain, while public domain allows for subtle "expressions of love" such as holding hands, hugging and kissing. All other expressions of sexual desire in public that transgress the norms of respectability are, therefore, seen as abnormal, as an "extreme", or as Jovana would say, as "flaunting one's homosexuality". Once again, this kind of testimony resonates with Warner's idea of a respectable homosexual. As Warner (2000) states, the "dignified", "respectable" homosexual is differentiated from the queer "promiscuous" gay, who "flaunts his sex and his faggotry" (p. 32), which – as a consequence - reproduces the hierarchy of shame (p. 49).

Consequently, an occasional kiss in alternative places, holding hands, hugging and flirting are among the things that my interviewees, embedded in the middle-class discourse of respectability, participate in in alternative social scene. As a result, they feel as free in alternative scene as they would in LGBT clubs, since in neither of them they would cross the limit of the "respectable" public exhibition of homoeroticism.

My field research therefore indicates, first of all, that the non-heterosexual women who attend post-gay spaces ground their personal identities in the middle-class belonging rather than in their sexual orientation, which is why they choose to socialize in alternative gay-friendly spaces, where urban middle-class gathers, rather than in LGBT spaces where they can only find "other lesbians with whom they have nothing in common".

This, in turn, indicates that they embrace the post-gay identity, according to which one's sexual orientation ceases to appear as a crucial marker of one's identity (Ghaziani, 2011; Collard, 1998). Furthermore, their post-gay identity goes hand in hand with the adoption of the homonormative discourse of normalization, which is indicated by their insistence on the necessity for the *inclusion* of the LGBT community in the heteronormative society.

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The overlapping between the post-gay identity and homonormative discourse is also apparent in my interviewees' defense of respectability in public expression of sexual desire. As I have demonstrated, post-gay women in gay-friendly alternative scene in Belgrade embrace homonormative discourse of normalization by being "respectably" post-gay in public places: although they do engage in homoerotic practices of kissing and holding hands, they are neither as frequent nor intense as they could appear in LGBT clubs. Namely, unlike in queer spaces of LGBT clubs, where norms of sexual behavior in public are constantly being transgressed, through unconventional practices such as public sex, the post-gay space of alternative clubs in Belgrade allows only for "respectable" public expressions of sexual desire, such as occasional kissing, touching and holding hands, both from its heterosexual and non-heterosexual visitors.

4.4. Post-gay identity as a transgression of homonormativity

Nevertheless, despite the apparent satisfaction of homonormative requirements of respectability in public expression of sexual desire, it appears that some of the post-gay women in alternative scene do not entirely fit into the homonormative discourse.

I have already noted that many of my interviewees did not categorize themselves in terms of sexual orientation, which indicated a crucial difference between post-gay identity and homonormativity[10]. Namely, homonormativity works as a confirmation of *gay* identity (Duggan, 2002, Richardson, 2005), while post-gay identity, in the case of non-heterosexual women who refuse any kind of sexual categorization, moves beyond sexual identity categories and argues for a fluid approach to sexual orientation. To put differently, although post-gay identity fits into the homonormative discourse through conforming to the norms of respectability in public display of

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[10] At the same time, as I have previously mentioned, a few of my interviewees did consider themselves as lesbians, yet renounced sexual orientation as a marker of their identity. In this case, post-gay discourse collapses with the discourse of homonormativity, since it connotes normalizing of the *gay* individual (Warner, 2000; Ghaziani, 2011).

sexual desire, it steps away from the homonormative discourse which was appropriated by *gay* community as part of the process of "normalizing" the *gay* identity.

Post-gay women in the alternative social scene also challenge the discourse of homonormativity by not complying with the nationalist rhetoric, i.e. by not engaging in the homonationalist discourse as discussed by Puar (2007). However, since Puar's (2007) analysis is rooted in the USA context in the aftermath of 9/11, it is a challenging task to apply the rhetoric of homonationalism to the context of Serbia. Namely, in order to apply Puar's (2007) theory to Serbian context, it would be necessary to discover whether homonationalism even exists as a widespread phenomenon in the context of Serbia and if it does, the question of who is the Other in the nationalist rhetoric of Serbia would still remain open. Therefore, due to the scope of this paper, I will not engage in further analysis of Puar's (2007) conceptualizations of homonationalism and the possibilities of its applications in the context of Serbia. Consequently, I leave this question open to future researchers interested in the intersections of sexuality and nationalism in the Serbian context.

Besides this, there are two other significant ways in which post-gay identity proves to be potentially transgressive of homonormative discourse, i.e. two ways in which post-gay spaces in Belgrade cease to be normalized. The first rupture of homonormative regimes consists of breaking of homonormative ideal of monogamous loving relationships (Richardson 2005, p. 522; Warner, 2000, p. 36, Seidman, 2002; p. 133) the second one refers to the non-conforming to the gender roles (Warner, 2000, p. 37).

In order to be seen as a "respectable" and "normal" gay person in the discourse of homonormativity, it is not enough not to flaunt one's homosexuality, i.e. to respect the private/ public boundary in which sex is relegated to the domain of the private. In addition to this, a

"respectable" homonormative gay has to adhere to all other parameters of the normalization of sexual desire, such as the practice of monogamous loving relationships (Richardson 2005, p. 522; Warner, 2000, p. 36, Seidman, 2002; p. 133). As an extension of homonormative discourse, the very same argument regarding monogamy has been used in the debates about equal citizenship rights, saying that gays should have the right to marry in order to officiate their monogamous loving relationships.

Nevertheless, the interviewees I conducted as well as the conversations I had with non-heterosexual women during participant observation suggest that a significant number of women visiting the alternative gay-friendly places in Belgrade are not involved in monogamous relationships. On the contrary, many of these women are cruising post-gay spaces, oftentimes engaging in casual one-night-stands or even practices such as group sex. This in turn indicates that the post-gay identity of these women is not tied anymore to the homonormative ideals of loving monogamous relationships. On the contrary, through practices such as group sex and frequent changes of sexual partners, their post-gay identity is – to a certain extent – embedded in queer transgressions of sexual norms (Warner, 2000, p. 37).

Nevertheless, since group sex practices take place in private after-parties, the post-gay space of gay-friendly alternative clubs in this sense remains homonormatively "respectable". However, it is in post-gay spaces of alternative nightclubs in Belgrade that many of these women either find their one-night stands or potential group-sex partners. Consequently, their queer transgressions of homonormative "respectability" of post-gay spaces consist in kissing several women on the dance-floor during the same night. Therefore, the otherwise homonormatively "respectable" post-gay spaces of gay-friendly alternative clubs allow for queer ruptures in the homonormative regimes regarding the practice of monogamy.

4.4.5. Expanding femininity, embracing masculinity

Moreover, post-gay spaces in Belgrade also allow for queer ruptures of homonormative regimes when it comes to the performing of gender roles. Warner (2000) has argued that the normalization process of the gay community supposed that the transgressors of gender norms, such as "nelly boys and butch girls" (p. 66) conforming to the right gender roles. Therefore, in the normalization discourse, both straight and non-straight women are expected to appropriate feminine looks and feminine behavior in order to perform the "right gender" (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Many of the women I have interviewed could be considered feminine (considering the stereotype), having long hairs and wearing casual female outfits. Consequently, they are perfectly fitting into the standards of normalization discourse in terms of femininity and the ideal of "lesbian chic".

The term "lesbian chic" was used for the first time in the 1990s to refer to lesbian images in mainstream media which, according to Laura Cottingham, had a role in "supporting and encouraging women's submission to heterosexuality" (1996, p. 2). In its original usage, the term "lesbian chic" was perused in discourse analysis and it referred to the media representations of lesbians as feminine women, which therefore made them more appealing for the straight audiences (Pottie, 1996; O'Sullivan, 1994; Cottingham, 1996). However, in my analysis I depart from the discourse analysis and make use of the term "lesbian chic" to refer to the normative (i.e. feminine) appearance of real-life lesbians that attend alternative venues in question.

The theoreticians of "lesbian chic" would say that women in gay-friendly alternative scene in Belgrade can freely kiss each other only because they are not really perceived as "lesbians", but are instead objectified by a male gaze and seen as a male sexual fantasy,

performing their "lesbianism" for the sake of men's pleasure. Back in 1996 Lisa Pottie criticized feminine lesbians' invisibility, stating that "the variations of femme make it easier for lesbians to be not seen, or if seen, to be reassuringly presented in the media as girls 'who just wanna have fun'" (1996, p. 50). More recently, in her research on queer women in hookup culture, Rupp (2014) posited that "the common claim about erotic interactions among women in the hookup culture is that they are intended purely to attract male attention" (p. 213). In this light, non-heterosexual women attending alternative venues would still conform to the notions of normalization discourse: in the end, they are not really perceived as lesbians, but rather as just women who are engaging in homoerotic practices for the sake of men's viewing pleasure.

Therefore, in order to find out whether feminine women I have interviewed are perceived as heterosexual or non-heterosexual in the context of gay-friendly alternative clubs in Belgrade, I asked my feminine-looking interviewees whether they ever received an encouraging comment from a heterosexual man while they were publicly intimate with another woman in these particular venues. Four of them claimed that they have, at least once, got an "encouraging" comment by straight men, who – according to the comments – have indeed perceived these women as straight. Ljubica retold the incidents: "It happened to me once or twice that two straight guys approached me and my girlfriend and asked us to kiss. Or, they would approach you and say 'I wish I could take you out and you can bring your girlfriend as well.'"

Nevertheless, all of my interviewees agreed that men commenting on their behavior or encouraging it are very rare incidents in gay-friendly alternative clubs, that is to say, they agreed that these men constitute a minority. The same as Natasa, and contrary to the theory of "lesbian chic", my other interviewees stated that, despite their femininity, they do not think they are being read as *straight* when they are kissing other girls in post-gay spaces. For example, Jelena told me

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the story about how in NC2 she got into an argument with a man who was reprimanding her for flirting with his girlfriend. For her, the reprimanding was a confirmation that the man read her flirtation as the manifestation of lesbian desire. Moreover, several of my interviewees claimed, without me posing a direct question, that heterosexual men in alternative social scene "know where they came, they know in what place they are". By saying this, my interviewees indicated that these men know that the alternative social scene is visited by women possessing lesbian desire. As a result, my interviewees agreed that the straight visitors coming to alternative clubs in Belgrade most probably know that the women kissing other women at these places are not doing it for the sake of male gaze, but rather for their own sexual pleasure.

All in consideration, the fact that the concept of "lesbian chic" does not manifest in these alternative spaces tells a lot about their post-gay formation in the sense that there is a big discrepancy between the post-gay space and the heteronormative space of the mainstream social scene in their treatment of non-heterosexual women. Namely, a few of my interviewees have brought to my attention that, outside these alternative clubs, i.e. in heteronormative social spaces, they have been subjected to the "male gaze" much more frequently. One of the examples is Anja's story about having been offered 1000 dinars to kiss her partner upon being seen holding hands in one of the mainstream clubs in downtown Belgrade. Consequently, unlike the mainstream social scene, the post-gay spaces do not impose heteronormative presuppositions upon the women who perform non-heterosexual practices in public. As a result, in post-gay spaces of alternative social scene the feminine non-heterosexual women are not perceived as straight.

However, although many of my interviewees, in accordance with the requirements of the normalization discourse, were feminine-looking women, some of them appropriated an

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androgynous look with short hair and baggy or masculine clothes. Consequently, my intention was to discover whether gender-bending women in terms of looks and clothing had a different experience than feminine looking women when it comes to their personal freedom to publicly kiss other women or flirt at gay-friendly alternative nightclubs. Surprisingly, androgynous women had the same experience as the feminine women I interviewed. They claimed that they did not experience any discomfort at venues in question regarding the affirmation of their same-sex desire. Furthermore, the same as my feminine interviewees, they also stated they feel as free to express their homoerotic desire in gay-friendly places as they feel in LGBT places.

During participant observation I have encountered a couple of butch women, whom unfortunately I did not manage to interview. Therefore, the lack of butch perspective on the acceptance of homoeroticism in alternative scene in Belgrade constitutes a gap in my research, which I hope will be filled by future researchers.

However, in order to get as much of a palpable picture as possible, I asked my feminine and androgynous interviews whether there were butch women present in the alternative scene and whether they ever saw them kissing other women. The opinions on this question were divided, but a few of my interviewees were certain they have seen a butch woman publically engaging in kissing another woman in alternative social scene. Nevertheless, when asked to compare the number of butch women present at the alternative scene with the number of butch women present at the LGBT scene, my interviewees unanimously agreed that LGBT social scene in Belgrade has a much larger number of butch women, especially young butch women who visit these places with their femme girlfriends.

Nevertheless, most of my interviewees implied that they do not think the reason for the lack of butch women in the alternative scene is their transgression of gender norms. For instance,

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Ljubica assuredly claimed that "there is no normative way of looking in these (alternative) places, you can look however you want". Ljubica's comment and my other interviewees' responses indicate that butch women are not invisible in the alternative scene, but that they constitute a minority. Moreover, the conversations I had both with my interviewees and with other non-heterosexual women during participant observations suggested that butch women are a minority in the alternative social scene because many of them do not belong to the privileged middle-class that goes out to alternative clubs in Belgrade. Namely, butch women have historically been connected to the working class (Lapovsky Kennedy & Madeline, 1992; Ciasullo, 2001) and nowadays in Belgrade the butch aesthetics is still tightly connected to working class. As Milena said: "You will find butches more often in LGBT places, it's a cultural phenomenon. They finished some sort of high school, they listen to turbo-folk, wear sweat suits, air-max and look like truck drivers. And of course, they go hand in hand their femme partners."

As I have previously stated, I could not arrange an interview with a butch person who attends alternative parties on a regular basis to hear her side of the story about her personal sense of belonging and freedom in alternative places. Nevertheless, I did conduct an interview with a butch woman in her late 20s who regularly attends LGBT places. When asked why she does not go to gay-friendly alternative places, she simply said that "she has never heard of them". Not having an university degree, not having a "creative job", not coming from a particularly well-off family or living in the city center, this woman was simply not exposed to the gay-friendly alternative scene and the middle-class circles that gather there. Her reason for not attending it, therefore, is not feeling more comfortable at LGBT places; it is being utterly unfamiliar with the existence of gay-friendly alternative scene in Belgrade. Her example does add up to the possibility that the reason butch women do not attend gay-friendly alternative clubs in higher

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degree is because they come from different social backgrounds and not because gay-friendly alternative scene discriminates against gender-nonconforming women. This possibility has also been confirmed during my participant observation, when in CC I was introduced to a butch woman who is a regular participant in the gay-friendly alternative social scene. Unsurprisingly, this butch woman is not a "truck driving" working-class lesbian that, according to Milena, can be found in LGBT clubs. Unsurprisingly, like all other non-heterosexual women I have interviewed, this butch woman is also a member of the urban middle-class.

To sum up, gay-friendly alternative scene in Belgrade functions as a post-gay space, which, in accordance with Brown's (2006) conclusions, gathers middle-class women deeply embedded in the homonormative requirements of being "respectably" gay. However, the example of post-gay spaces in Belgrade departs from Brown's (2006) conceptualizations of post-gay space, according to which the post-gay spaces are embedded in the discourse of homonormativity. On the contrary, the post-gay spaces in Belgrade allow for transgressing the heteronormative requirements of performing the right gender and participating in monogamous loving relationships, as long as the requirements of belonging to the right class are met.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I discussed the recent phenomenon of non-LGBT public social spaces that are open for the affirmations of non-heterosexual female identities in the context of homophobic Serbian society. More precisely, I discussed the development of alternative gay-friendly social scene in the urban context of Belgrade by focusing on non-heterosexual female identities that are welcomed, or more precisely – that *belong* to these alternative spaces rather than to the "homogenous" LGBT social scene.

As I have demonstrated, the gay-friendly social scene in Belgrade emerged both as an alternative to LGBT clubs and as an alternative to the mainstream turbo-folk and pop social scene. More precisely, it resembles what could be called a hipster hotspot, which welcomes both straight and non-straight young urban middle-class people. Therefore, the gay-friendly social scene functions as a space where sexual difference is accepted, yet it is not the indicator of the space, as, for instance, it is in queer spaces of LGBT clubs. As a consequence, gay-friendly spaces in Belgrade prove to be an example of what Brown (2006) calls "post-gay" spaces.

The post-gay spaces in Belgrade are also a place of belonging for "post-gay" women: non-heterosexual subjects who refuse identifying themselves according to their sexual orientation. Post-gay identity, as it was argued in scholarship (Ghaziani, 2011; Warner, 2000; Nash, 2013b) and as it was proven in my field research, is tightly connected to the discourse of normalization and homonormativity. For example, post-gay women in alternative gay-friendly scene in Belgrade adhere to the codes of respectability intrinsic to the discourse of homonormativity: they express their homoerotic desire in public spaces in a subtle manner – occasionally kissing their partners or holding hands. At the same time, they are judging the

"excessive" sexualization of LGBT space and public flaunting of one's homosexuality in the LGBT scene.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that post-gay women's embracing of respectability makes the equation between post-gay and homonormative discourse plausible, post-gay spaces in Belgrade accommodate also post-gay women who transgress certain codes of homonormativity. Due to their adoption of masculinity, butch women in alternative gay-friendly scene break the heteronormative, i.e. homonormative codes of "performing the right gender". At the same time, a number of post-gay women in the alternative social scene kiss multiple women during one night or engage in group sex, thereby transgressing the homonormative requirements of striving towards loving monogamous relationships.

As a result, this suggests that the post-gay spaces in Belgrade are rather defined by belonging to the urban middle-class than by the embracing the homonormative discourse in its entirety. Namely, post-gay discourse and homonormative discourse in which the post-gay spaces and post-gay identities are embedded, overlap entirely only when it comes to the following of the norms of respectable public behavior. In this respect, it can be argued that the overlapping between post-gay and homonormative discourse comes from the fact that respectability has been historically tied to middle-class belonging (McClintock, 1995, p. 100). At the same time, middle-class belonging (of gay subjects) has been the basis for the emergence of the homonormative discourse (Visser, 2008, p. 1346; Nash, 2013b, p. 244) which, as I have demonstrated, structures post-gay spaces in Belgrade. Furthermore, the deviations from the norms of homonormativity, such as transgressing gender roles or the ideals of monogamy, are allowed as long as the subjects transgressing them belong to the middle-class that are occupy these spaces.

In conclusion, contrary to the LGBT spaces in Belgrade that accommodate mostly working class and some middle-class visitors, the post-gay spaces in Belgrade emerged as an alternative spot for socializing for specific middle-class urban hipster non-heterosexual women. These post-gay women choose not to socialize in LGBT social scene mainly because their educational background and social upbringing differentiate them from lesbian and bisexual women that attend exclusively LGBT clubs, who by and large belong to the working class. Consequently, their identity is not anymore rooted in their sexual orientation, but rather it rests on their middle-class belonging. Therefore, their choice of socialization logically become post-gay spaces, since, unlike LGBT clubs, they are constructed as spaces aimed for urban middle-class. Post-gay spaces in Belgrade, therefore, are spaces of middle-class belonging, bounded by the discourse of homonormativity to the extent that they require adherence to the norms of respectability in public display of affection. Consequently, post-gay spaces allow for ruptures in homonormative regimes as long as the transgressions are performed by those who belong to the middle-class.

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