

SERBIA

# Roma Revolution

by Alessandro Gandolfi





New Belgrade. A Roma party taking place on Valentine's Day at the Garden Hill dance hall.



## IN BELGRADE, WITH MUSIC AND A THIRST FOR EMPOWERMENT, SIX TALENTED WOMEN ARE ON A MISSION TO CHANGE THE GYPSY WORLD

**They've been labelled the world's first "Roma girl group". They're six charming, committed young women, and the messages they're sending to their peers through their music (in Romani) are clear: fight abuse, stay in school, and don't get married at 16. Empower yourselves.**

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"Don't force me, daddy – goes one of their songs – because I'll never be happy that way". Pretty Loud's videos ("because 'pretty loud' – explains Silvia – is exactly how we want to be") on YouTube have now amassed almost 200,000 views and the band has already sung for the United Nations, in front of the Obama Foundation and at the Women of the World Festival in London, even featuring

on the front page of the New York Times. A story with a happy ending? Not for the Roma population of Serbia (accounting for 1.5% of the total population), second-class citizens who – persecuted for centuries and massacred by the Nazis – suffer racism on a daily basis and continue to live segregated in the *mahalla* (neighbourhoods) of Zemun; the very neighbourhoods where the members of "pretty loud" and their families live.

There are several NGOs working to change things in Serbia, one of which is the GRUBB foundation which has been educating Roma children for years through art, dance and music. In 2014, six of them – now grown up and mixing Balkan sounds with rap – started the band that's now trying to change the image of the gypsy world.





Zemun (Belgrade). Two old buildings dominate a huge working-class district that also includes two *mahalla* (or Roma neighbourhoods) where some of the Pretty Loud members live: Vojni put (literally meaning “military street”), where the GRUBB Foundation is also based, and Ciganske rupe (literally meaning “gypsy hole”).



Belgrade. The group Pretty Loud rehearsing before a live link-up with the Obama Foundation: from the left, Zlata, Silvía, Elma, Iva, Dijana and Selma.







Belgrade. Many Roma were killed in the former Nazi concentration camp of Sajmište. Today, a poor Roma family is living in its abandoned tower.





Zemun (Belgrade). Pretty Loud's Zlata Ristić (right) dances with her mother Ljilja and grandmother Mica in the house where they live, located in the *mahalla* (or Roma neighbourhood) of Vojni put (literally meaning "military street").





Zemun (Belgrade). A photo from a few years ago of the twins Elma Dalipi (left) and Selma, now 15 years old, in their house in the Altina district where they live with their grandparents.





Zemun (Belgrade). Some members of Pretty Loud rehearsing a dance routine at the GRUBB Foundation headquarters: Selma Dalipi (left) talks to Silvia Sinani whilst Elma (Selma's twin sister) chooses the music.



Zemun (Belgrade). From the left, Silvia Sinani, Dijana Ferhatović and Zlata Ristić spend an evening at the Pacha bar in the *mahalla* (or Roma neighbourhood) of Ciganske rupe (literally meaning "gypsy hole").







Zemun (Belgrade). A hairdresser's in the *mahalla* (or Roma neighbourhood) of Vojni put (literally meaning “military street”) where several members of Pretty Loud live and where the GRUBB Foundation is also based.





Zemun (Belgrade). During the afternoon at the headquarters of the GRUBB Foundation, Pretty Loud band member Iva Ferhatović teaches Roma children during their art class.





Zemun (Belgrade). Silvia Sinani (centre), a member of Pretty Loud, and her family visit the Sunday market in the *mahalla* (or Roma neighbourhood) of Ciganske rupe (literally meaning “gypsy hole”).





New Belgrade. The famous singer Corona in his studio talking about possible collaborations with the Roma choreographer and singer Danijel Rasitovic, a member of the Grubb Foundation and co-founder of the group Roma Sijam.



Zemun (Belgrade). The main street in the *mahalla* (or Roma neighbourhood) of Vojni put (literally meaning "military street") where several members of Pretty Loud live and where the GRUBB Foundation is also based.







Belgrade. Some members of the group Pretty Loud putting on their make-up before a live link-up with the Obama Foundation: from the left, Dijana Ferhatović, Silvia Sinani and, from behind, Iva Ferhatović.





Zemun (Belgrade). A serviceperson on a bus heading to the *mahalla* (or Roma neighbourhood) of Vojni put (literally meaning “military street”).





Zemun (Belgrade). In the Marije Bursać district several Roma families live in terrible conditions in a small dell that was once a railway yard.



New Belgrade. A Roma party taking place on Valentine's Day at the Garden Hill dance hall.







Zemun (Belgrade). Silvia Sinani, 25, seen from behind, is playing with her niece while her mother Ivanka and grandmother Kumrija (on the left) speak with other relatives in the living room of their house in the *mahalla* (or Roma neighbourhood) of Vojni put (literally meaning “military street”).





Belgrade. Buildings under construction as part of Belgrade Waterfront, a vast urban redevelopment project on the River Sava.





Zemun (Belgrade). At the Grubb Foundation's headquarters, Ibrahim Gasi and Daniel Ibrahimovic are working on some new songs for the group Pretty Loud.





Zemun (Belgrade). Silvia Sinani, 25, a member of Pretty Loud, in a car observing the streets of the *mahalla* (or Roma neighbourhood) where she lives; the area is called Vojni put (literally meaning “military street”).





Several residents of Zemun (Belgrade) relaxing in the evening in bars on barges moored along the Danube.





Belgrade. Selma Dalipi giving Iva Ferhatović a massage before Pretty Loud's live link-up with the Obama Foundation.





Zemun (Belgrade). A street in the *mahalla* (or Roma neighbourhood) of Vojni put (literally meaning “military street”) where several members of Pretty Loud live, photographed from the headquarters of the GRUBB Foundation.





Zemun (Belgrade). Elma Dalipi (centre) and her twin sister Selma in their house in the Altina district where they live with their grandparents (on the left, their grandfather Agim).





Zemun (Belgrade). Dijana Ferhatović (left) and Zlata Ristić, from the group Pretty Loud, walking down the main street in the *mahalla* (or Roma neighbourhood) of Vojni put (literally meaning “military street”) where they live, sharing a joke with some workers who are repairing the road.





Belgrade. The interval during an opera at the National Theatre: for the young women of Pretty Loud, to be able to perform one day at Serbia's most important theatre would be a dream come true.



Zemun (Belgrade). A huge working-class district that also includes two *mahalla* (or Roma neighbourhoods) where some of the Pretty Loud members live: Vojni put (literally meaning "military street"), where the GRUBB Foundation is also based, and Ciganske rupe (literally meaning "gypsy hole").





