

Dear Friends,

Sadly, I cannot be with you, today, when we are commemorating Misjo. Still, it feels strange and intangible, that he is not with us anymore. Only days before his tragic passing away, we spoke on the phone and were looking forward to meeting each other again soon and to follow up our documentary plans. A round trip along historical sites in Montenegro, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia and back to Macedonia, we had planned, interviewing people on the side. Misjo had the historical expertise, he spoke the languages, he was to be guide and driver. I was the one asking questions, the international component. Now, with the loss, a feeling of emptiness remains.

“We become aware of the void, as we fill it, Misjo”, I said to him one day during the long winter of last year. We were drinking beer together, as usual. He agreed, smiling at me. He looked happy for a moment.

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Here the translation from Dutch language of Misjo's obituary, published in an opinion leading Dutch newspaper, NRC Handelsblad.

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Anyone who spends more than an hour in the idyllic town of Ohrid, on the lake of the same name, cannot escape the Dutchman A. den Doolaard, pseudonym of Cornelis 'Bob' Spoelstra. The writer and adventurer died twenty-five years ago in Hoenderloo, Netherlands, however, since then a monument to him has been erected in the ancient Macedonian town and there is even a small museum: a memorial room with photos and dozens of books in several languages.

In the first decades after the second world war, Den Doolaard enjoyed great fame in the Netherlands. Through his work as a broadcaster for Radio Oranje, the resistance station in London, but also through novels he wrote during his wanderings around the Balkans in the years before the war. A particularly popular novel, *Herberg met het hoefijzer* (*Inn with a horseshoe*) is set in Albania. Another hit, *Wedding of the Seven Gypsies* is set just across the border in that country, in Ohrid.

Actually, Den Doolaard is better known there than in the Netherlands. That fame is due to one man: Misjo Juzmeski, a small, roundish, but not puffy man with a slightly melancholic glance. Juzmeski was born, raised and sadly died in Ohrid on the last day of April this year. Two policemen found him in his car after a heart attack. He had just turned 55.

As a teenager, Juzmeski guided tourists through the steep cobbled streets of the beautiful town, past numerous Byzantine churches, monasteries and chapels. A striking number of Dutch people were among his audience. In the 1980s, some 50,000 of them

visited the town and the lake of the same name annually. They told the young Juzmeski about Den Doolaard.

Endowed with a great talent for languages, he then learned Dutch and read the author's books and articles. He kind of adored the man, as Juzmeski liked to tell every visitor of his cultural center. He set up the memorial room in the middle of town opposite a fourteenth-century chapel; he created the support for the monument, which has stood there since 2006, on the lakeside, and he wrote *Our Dutch Friend A. den Doolaard*. In that book, which appeared in several languages, he lovingly (but resolutely) corrected his hero's erroneous historical assertions about the town and the region; *Bruiloft der zeven zigeuners (Wedding of the Seven Gypsies)* is a rich source of references. At the same time, Juzmeski noted with satisfaction that Macedonia, although not yet a country at the time, had won the heart of the famous Dutchman. "It was precisely here in the land of the Macedonians that A. den Doolaard found what seemed difficult to find elsewhere." And that meant something: Den Doolaard led a wandering existence for a long time.

Den Doolaard himself wrote that he came to love Macedonia "while wandering", "as I still love it now above all other countries I have travelled through".

Every visitor with an interest in the history of Ohrid would meet Juzmeski. Then he would tell about the region, the lake, the Islamic Ottoman rulers and the Christian persecutors. And about Den Doolaard. He could see the irony in the fact that the Dutch had brought him to the writer, whereas now he often told about him to Dutch people without having the faintest idea of the writer.

Thanks to Juzmeski, Den Doolaard had become a signboard for Ohrid. Now Ohrid was the signboard for Den Doolaard.

Juzmeski leaves behind a wife, two sons and dozens of friends distraught. One of those friends is Ritz Mollema, a Dutch translator living in Malta. Two years ago he went to live indefinitely on a mountainside near Ohrid, with a beautiful view of the lake. For months Juzmeski and Mollema saw each other almost daily. They talked for hours about Den Doolaard and the region and they had conceived the plan to travel together to historical places in the Balkans and to make a documentary about it.

"Because of corona, we already postponed the trip twice and now my friend has passed away. Misjo was a very special person." To present him only as a cheerleader of Den Doolaard and the city would be to shortchange him, Mollema underlines. "He wrote essays, short stories and reviews. It wasn't just 'cheer' with him either. He had a rather typical way of talking, for instance. Almost every sentence he ended with a kind of cynical laugh. I sensed a kind of tragedy in him, which seemed connected to the pain he felt about the corruption in his country. At the same time, he did not lose heart: he had bought a piece of land just outside Ohrid which he wanted to develop for cultural purposes. That shows hope."

Mollema strives to ensure the survival of the Den Doolaard museum for at least the coming year. "That is necessary, because other entrepreneurs are already vying for the spot.

But whether the museum continues to exist or not, Mollema recognizes what all Dutch people who have ever visited Ohrid already know: this 'island in time and space', as Den Doolaard called the town and its lake, will never be the same without the multilingual guide, promoter and free journalist.

Original Dutch article:

<https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2021/06/23/misjo-joezmeski-1966-2021-bracht-nederlandse-schrijver-roem-in-macedonie-a4048482>

[https://www.ohridnews.com/nova-kniga-od-misho-uzmeski-explore-ohrid-istrazhi-go-ohrid-edna-poinakva-turistichka-prikazna/?fbclid=IwAR2EC89uHrn2Y-Vdt0aHp64p9F\\_jRtbLwaOuRz5G\\_jGMr5ZubJfGU9HkmM](https://www.ohridnews.com/nova-kniga-od-misho-uzmeski-explore-ohrid-istrazhi-go-ohrid-edna-poinakva-turistichka-prikazna/?fbclid=IwAR2EC89uHrn2Y-Vdt0aHp64p9F_jRtbLwaOuRz5G_jGMr5ZubJfGU9HkmM)

