

Book: Gozitan Crossings. The Impact of Migration and Return Migration on an Island Community

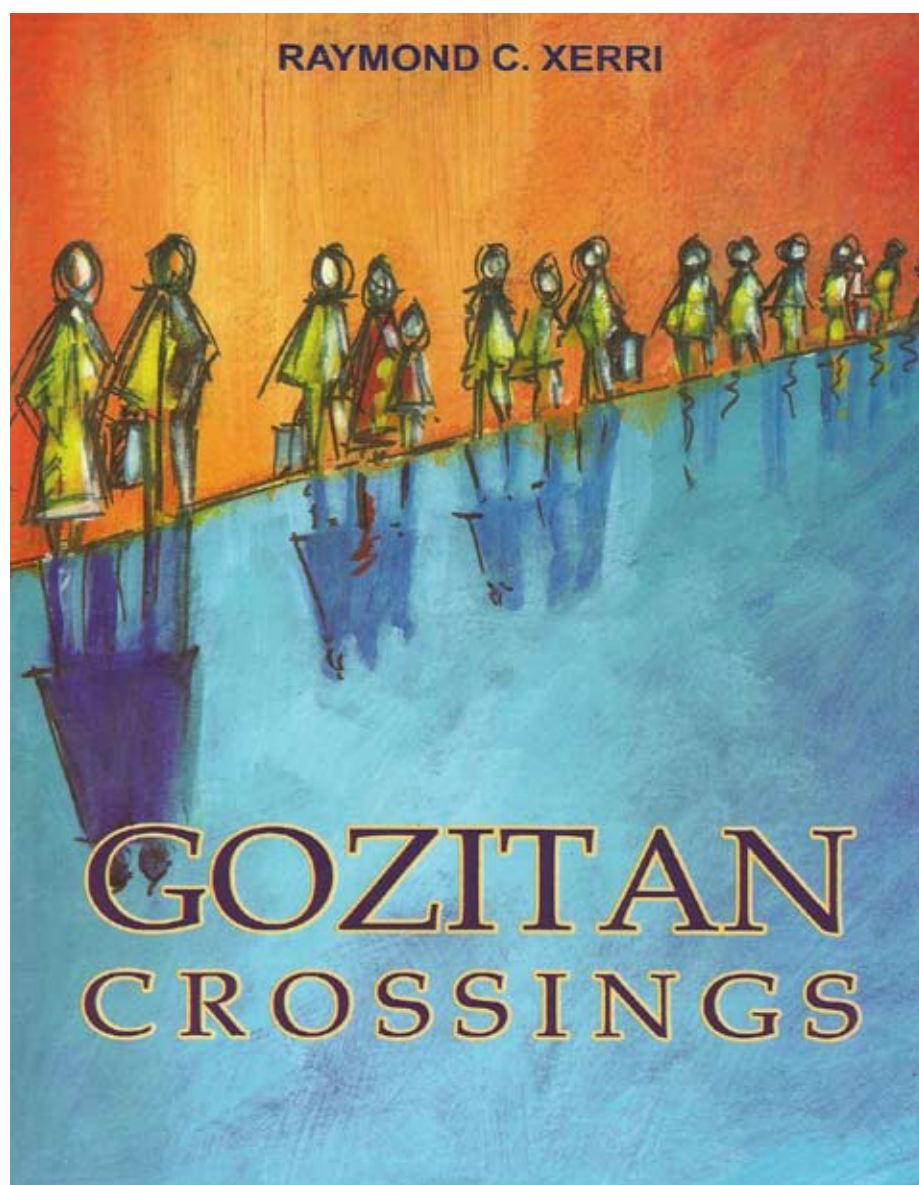
Raymond C. Xerri

Malta: A&M Printing; Qala, (2005); 317 pages

REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

Living on an island offers both advantages and disadvantages. Many people on the Inner Hebrides off the north-western coast of Scotland have to travel to the mainland either on a daily or on a weekly basis in order to go to work. The same can be said to islands such as the Isle of Man or the Orkney Islands. The same might also be said for the inhabitants of the Aeolian Islands, off the western coast of nearby Sicily. Gozo is no exception.

It is a fact that hundreds of Gozitans have to travel to mainland Malta for work or in order to study either on a daily basis or quite frequently. However, Raymond C. Xerri's *Gozitan Crossings* looks further away from this reality. The subject for his doctorate dealt with those hundreds of Gozitans who left the Maltese Islands to go and settle either 'down under', that is, in far-away Australia, the farthest continent from Malta, or in



other countries such as the UK, the USA and other destinations. *Gozitan Crossings* can be considered a practical summary of the Ph.D. thesis that Dr Xerri wrote about this engaging subject. Xerri states that the book 'owes its origin to a Ph.D thesis I completed at Victoria University in Melbourne between 1996 and 2002'.

Dr Raymond C. Xerri is in many ways 'the right person at the right time' to deal with such a particular subject. Having himself lived in both the United States and in Australia, and having been involved with the Maltese communities on both continents, Xerri was able to gather useful information about the reality of Maltese immigration. He delved deep into the subject by dealing with it from different points-of-view. He opens his book with a chapter that focuses on the ferry crossings that take place between Malta and Gozo. Carrying an autobiographical imprint throughout the entire book, Xerri opens his first chapter by quoting a conversation between himself and his grandfather. He creates a contrast between the ferry-crossing between Malta and Gozo and the long voyage that his grandfather undertook when he left Gozo for Australia. Taking this experience as his point of departure, he then moves on to discuss the Australian experience of the Gozitan community which has now left its mark on Australian society at large with various prominent people hailing from Gozo holding significant offices in the country.

In trying to describe the ethos of the Gozitan people who have done well in Australia, Xerri quotes a certain Captain Lewis Ritchie C.V.O. who in his book of 1838 'The Epic of Malta' has this to say about the people of the tiny island of Gozo: "The Gozitans have certain definite characteristics that set them apart from the people of Malta themselves. They are a tougher, less gay race and they make excellent colonists and pioneers. They have been called 'The Scots of the Maltese people'". By quoting Captain Ritchie, Xerri manages to say in a nutshell what many anthropologists have struggled to say over the period of many centuries.

The chapter on linguistics might easily be considered the most interesting of all since, in it, Xerri provides an entire glossary of Gozitan phrases which even on nearby Malta might have a different meaning altogether.

'Gozitan Crossings' is a book to be recommended to both anthropologists and historians alike. However the general public will find it useful in order to understand better the roots of Maltese migration around the world. One of the authors cited above compared the Gozitans to the Scots; I would even consider comparing them to the Irish since both the people of Gozo as well as the people of the Irish Republic, having been both colonised, have so much in common within the reality of their far-flung diaspora.