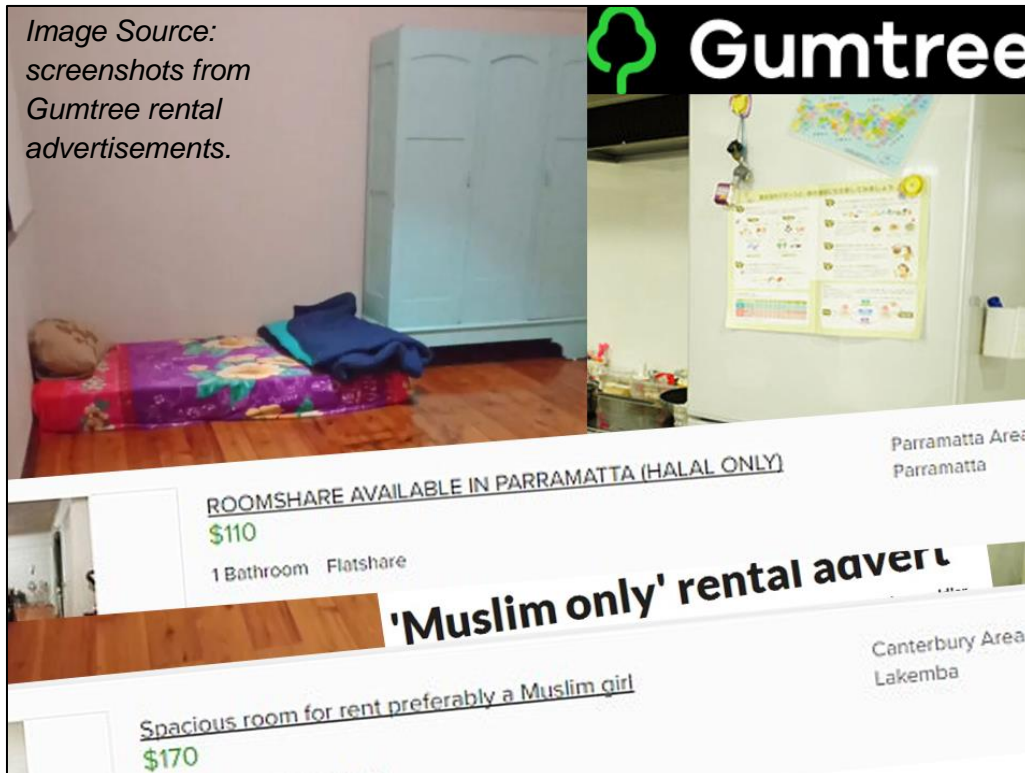


“To let it, or not to let” - negotiated risks and the construction of housing informality in ethnically diverse owner-occupied premises in suburban Sydney.

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Abstract:

In Australian suburbs in the face of increasing housing unaffordability, owner-occupied shared houses make up a growing private rental submarket. Researchers have sought to analyse the growth and implications of shared housing on tenants, community wellbeing and urban planning system. There is limited research exploring the dynamics that motivate owner-occupiers to share section(s) of their houses with non-related individuals and families without formal rental instruments (e.g. standardised tenancy agreements, sub-division consents from the councils). Mainly, how informality operates in this rental submarket and how owner-occupiers with distinct ethnic and cultural backgrounds negotiate informality are scant. Drawing on a qualitative exploration among Muslim owner-occupiers of South Asian ethnic origin in the suburbs of Blacktown, Quakers Hill and Rooty Hill, this paper traces out a distinct form of housing informality that goes beyond the perceived economic rationalities of rent and returns. Instead, there are narratives of multiple risks in the intersections of gender, race, religious identity and local planning controls that contribute to the production of these shared housing conditions. The findings have the value in knowing how ethnically diverse homeowners share residential spaces with others and venture to make home beneath the ordered city. More importantly, the everyday narratives of risks in these informal renting practices trouble owner-occupiers to attach meanings of home with the houses. The paper concludes that despite housing unaffordability triggers this owner-occupier-led rental sub-market, with time, cultural attributes significantly shape a more precarious form of housing informality that is increasing in Sydney's suburbs, yet under-researched.

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