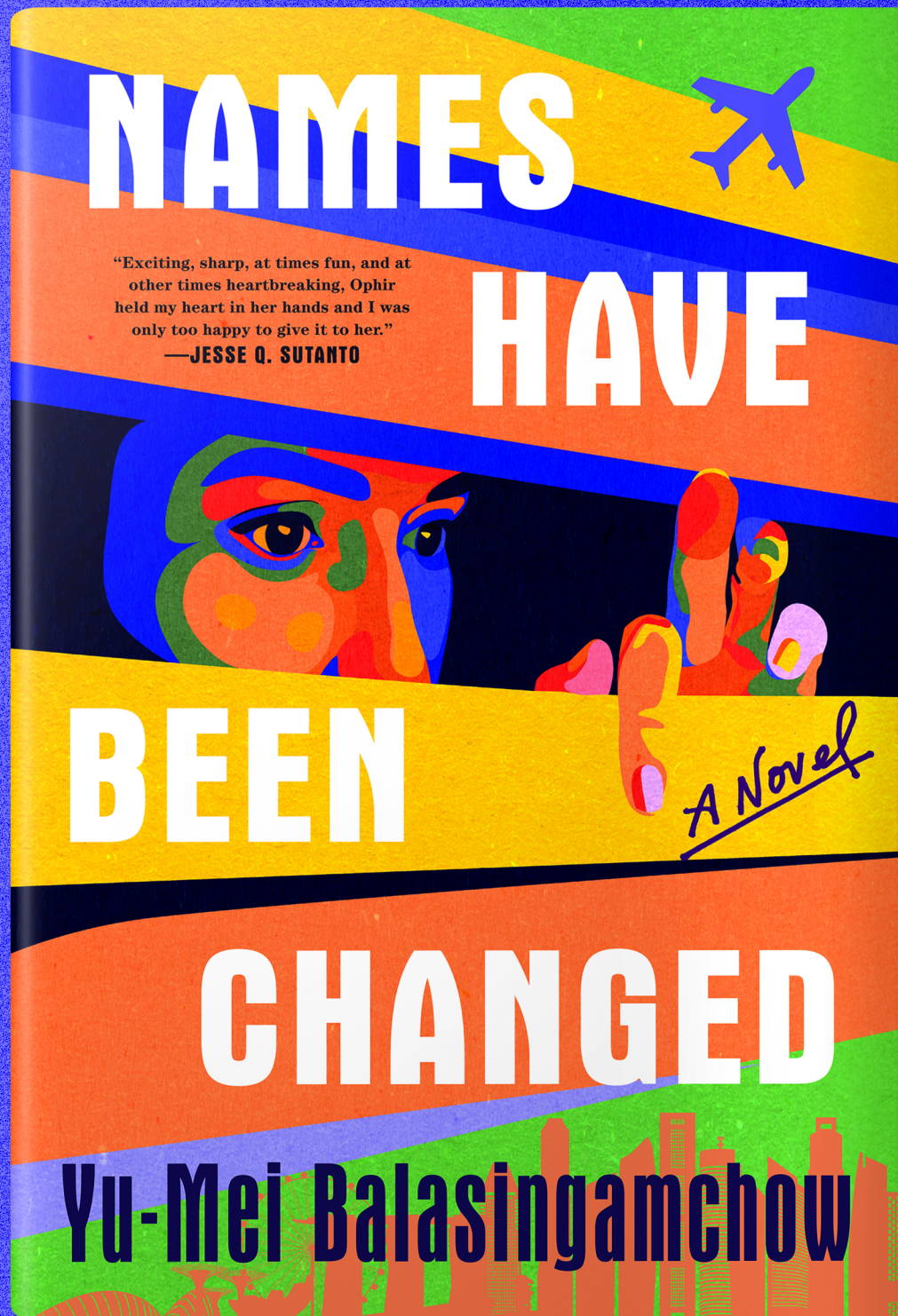


BOOK CLUB KIT





DEAR READER,

I vividly remember the moment the opening paragraphs of *Names Have Been Changed* came to me. Five years ago, I was at my writing desk, working on something else, when a voice bubbled up in my mind: urgent, prickly, and demanding to be taken seriously. I started writing, and the character behind the voice, Ophir, gradually emerged, telling all on a podcast about being on the run around the world for ten years after committing a crime.

Those first words on the page, spoken by my protagonist, Ophir, haven't changed much since that day. I realized her story would be about shifting identities, concealing one's true self, and, for Ophir, an eventual reckoning about who she really is. I dreamed up situations for her that were inspired by and recklessly transcended my own experiences traveling around the world. In some ways she became my alter ego, doing things I'm far too chicken to do!

But Ophir's madcap globetrotting odyssey is also the sum of my deep-seated fears. I moved to the US alone less than a decade ago. Sending the fictional Ophir on wild adventures allowed me to explore these fears and the dynamics of being an immigrant and not feeling at home. Ophir's voice, impatient and confounding, freed me to write about the realities of modern emigration and the anxieties and concerns of those who cross borders and inhabit in-between spaces, including the diasporic characters she meets who have left Singapore for other reasons. All this came together with elements of romance, mystery, suspense, and family estrangement in a picaresque story that Ophir insists on telling on her own terms.

Names Have Been Changed grapples with questions that I think many of us, immigrants or not, wonder about: *Where do I belong, and why? What is an authentic voice, if there is such a thing?* I hope you will enjoy listening to Ophir's. It's taken her a long time to find the guts to speak. And thank you so much for reading my words.

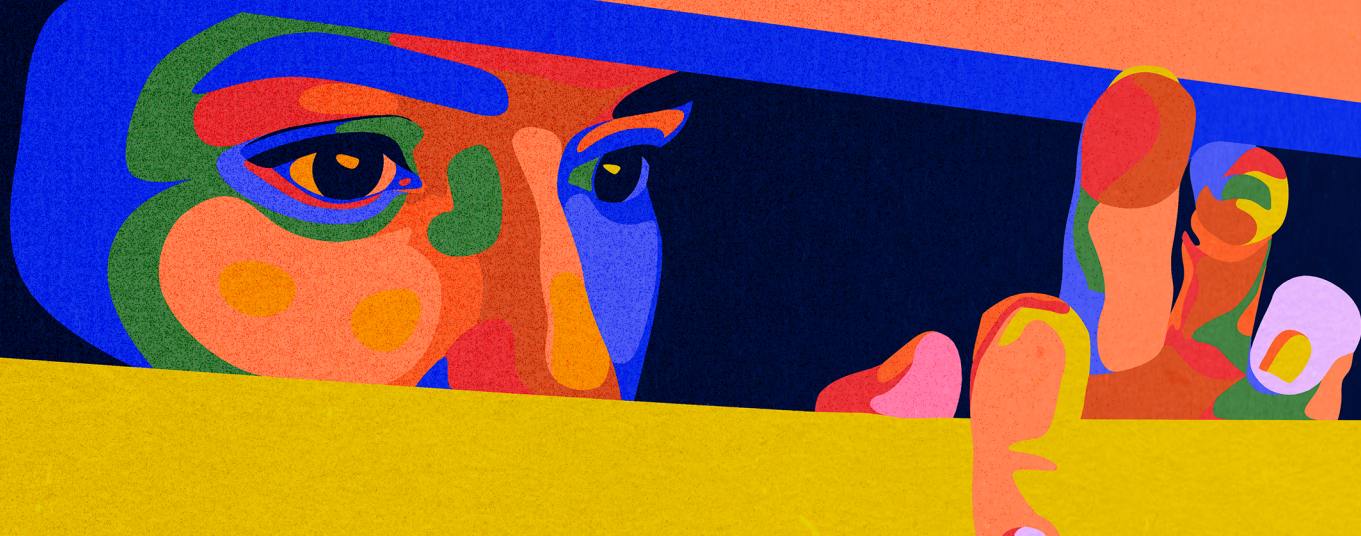
YU-MEI

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**NOTE: These discussion questions contain some spoilers!
We suggest you finish the book before you read through them.*

1. What does the novel say about the power of names as they relate to identity? We meet our narrator as “Ophir,” but we know that she has survived by adopting many names and identities over the course of the years she’s been on the run. How do these seemingly surface-level reinventions shape her sense of self? Why do you think we, as the reader, are never told her real name?
2. Ophir flees Singapore initially to escape imprisonment for her crimes. By the time she starts telling us her story, do you think she considers herself to be truly free? What are the costs of freedom and what toll does it take on her?
3. Ophir is mixed-race, with Indian, Chinese, Malay, Arab, and Eurasian ethnic backgrounds. How is Ophir’s racial identity seen and treated differently when she’s in different countries? What ideas is the book exploring around visibility and assimilation?
4. How does Ophir’s life on the run mirror or distort the more expected immigrant experience? In what ways does the novel complicate and challenge traditional narratives about migration and belonging?
5. Seemingly against her best efforts, Ophir forms connections that are romantic, platonic, and familial over the course of her years on the run. Who are the most important figures in her life during this time? Is she able to create genuine connections with these people? What do her experiences with them teach her about how she wants to build her life going forward?
6. Accents and language play a big part in the novel, from Ophir’s voice acting, to her using and hearing different accents aboard, to working as a translator. How does language act as a tether to home throughout the novel? In what ways do Singlish and Malay act as emotional triggers?

7. Why do you think Ophir tells her story through the form of a podcast? How does this format fit within the tradition of oral storytelling? Do you think you experienced the story differently reading it on the page versus listening to the audiobook?
8. As the podcast audience grows and media frenzy builds, how does public attention affect the telling of her story? Does having an audience empower or threaten her? What do you think the novel is saying about true-crime culture, especially for the people who are living through it?
9. Ophir is up-front about the crimes she commits and doesn't shy away from recounting selfish actions on her part, yet it's hard not to feel for her. At what points did you feel most aligned or most conflicted with Ophir's choices? What do you think the book is saying about living life on your own terms, whether or not others agree with you?
10. Ophir's longing for "home" is clear throughout her story, as seen through her memories of her family and homeland, and through how she reacts to meeting Singaporeans abroad. Given that, why do you think she decides not to return to Singapore at the end of the novel? How does Ophir's understanding of home evolve over time?
11. We're told from the beginning that Ophir is going to omit identifying details but she's finally going to tell her real story. Besides the details that have been changed, do you think she's telling the whole truth—to us and to herself? Do you feel like we really know her by the end or do you think there's still a layer of masking and performance?



PHOEBE ROBINSON'S TOP TIPS FOR STARTING A PODCAST

Both Ophir, the main character of *Names Have Been Changed*, and Tiny Reparations Books' founder Phoebe Robinson know how to create a podcast that catches people's attention. Here are Phoebe's top tips—perfect if you're considering starting your own podcast!

- 1. Find your why.** Why are you telling your story now? Why do you want to share your life with the world? Why will your listeners tune in for more?
- 2. Use your unique, distinctive voice.** The host is the star of the show and people are listening for the story that only you can tell. Being authentic and sharing your true self through the mic is the key to building an audience that loves you for you.
- 3. Structure is important.** Even if you're telling a personal story, pacing matters. Each episode should have a clear arc with beats that keep the listener engaged.
- 4. Subvert expectations.** People think they've heard about you or your story before? They don't know the half of it! Use your podcast as a platform to set the record straight once and for all.
- 5. Leave listeners wanting more!** If you're anything like me (or Ophir), you're not going to spill your whole story in one episode. Hook listeners with a suspenseful moment or a cliffhanger that will make them need to hear more. Let listeners feel like they're discovering the whole truth over time by tuning in again and again.