

# Profiling Transforms ‘The Reluctant Fundamentalist’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 3, 2013 - 4:03pm

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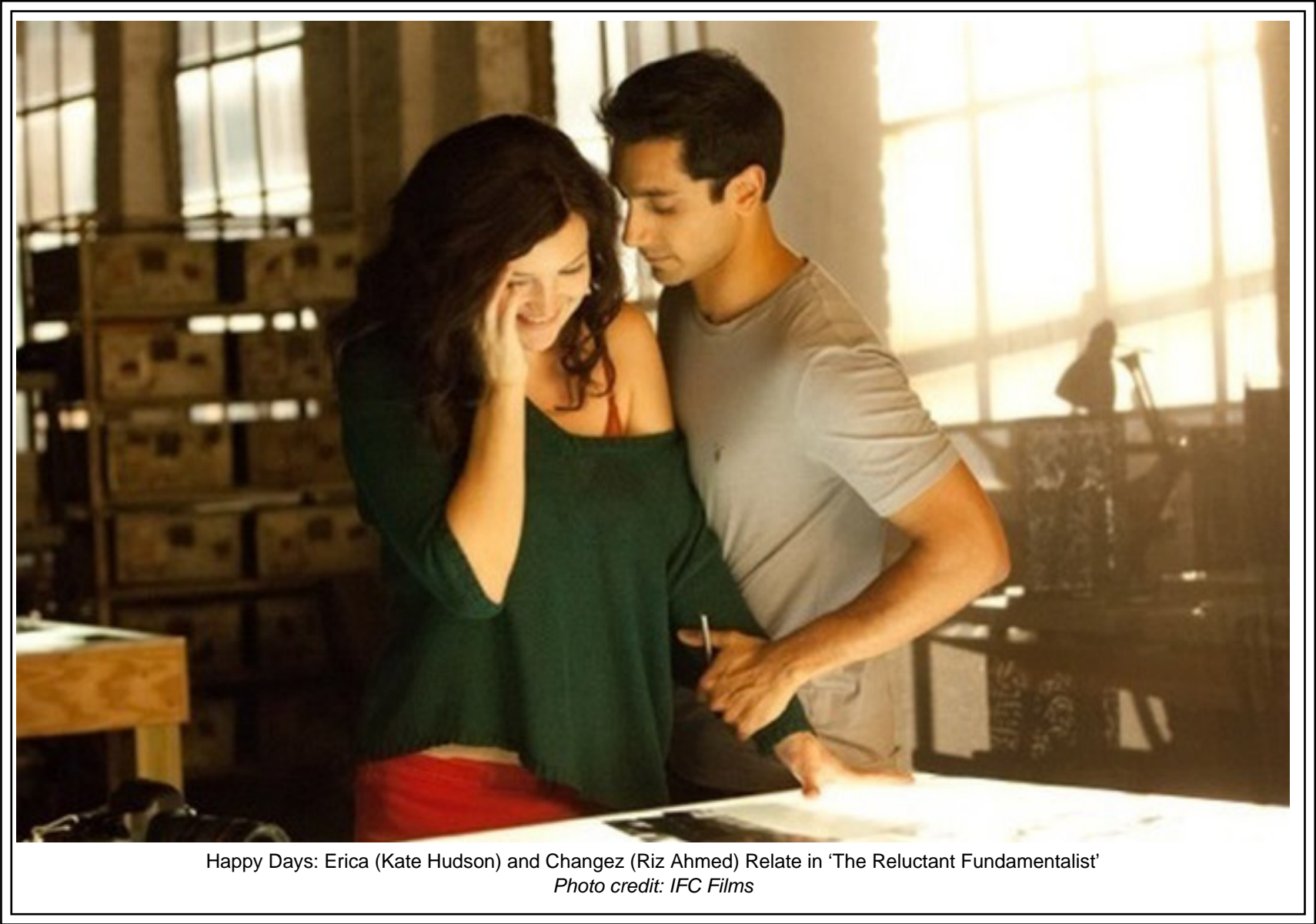


Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Given the recent media coverage of the Boston bombings, the issue of profiling – judging a individual as suspect based on religion or appearances – is an ongoing problem. Director Mira Nair explores profiling in the context of September 11th in “The Reluctant Fundamentalist.”

Based on a novel by Mohsin Hamid, the film is the journey of the main character, a Pakistani immigrant who shows a genius for business in an Ivy League education in America, and scores on the fast track with one of the top financial firms in New York City. His life changes on September 11th, 2001, and the attitude towards him changes as well. On a human level, the film is a empathetic exploration of what can happen to an individual who is marginalized for no reason except for profiling. On a geopolitical level, it also exposes the paranoia associated with law enforcement (or rule breaking) agencies like the CIA, who are charged with trying to disseminate something, anything in the war against terror. And finally, on a personal character level, how connections and relationships break down in the wake of the fear generated after 9/11.

Changez (Riz Ahmed) is a financial studies professor in Lahore, Pakistan. When a fellow professor (an American) is kidnapped, Changez agrees to meet with Bobby (Liev Schreiber), an American reporter who seeks his connection to the incident. Changez begins the story with his roots in Lahore, when he broke from his family to study finance in the late 1990s at a top Ivy League school in the USA. After graduation, he gets a job with a high level financial firm in New York City and is is mentored by one of the firm’s upper managers, Jim Cross (Kiefer Sutherland).



Happy Days: Erica (Kate Hudson) and Changez (Riz Ahmed) Relate in ‘The Reluctant Fundamentalist’  
Photo credit: IFC Films

Changez rises quickly through the ranks, in recognition of his talent in reducing costs in the firm’s holdings. He also meets a local artist, Erica

(Kate Hudson), and despite her tragic past they fall in love. This all comes crashing down, like the World Trade Center itself, on September 11th, 2001. In the aftermath, Changez is stripped searched in an airport, arrested on the street and grows a beard in solidarity with his countrymen. He eventually leaves the financial firm, goes back to Pakistan, and falls under the suspicion of the CIA. Whether this final bit of profiling will reveal his true nature has not been determined.

The film rises through the performance of Riz Ahmed as Changez. He succinctly characterizes the innocence of a young college student, the ambition of a career climber and the haunted, searing look in Changez's eyes after his life collapses. It is truly a rocky path for the character, one that creates an understanding for the dilemma he faces. Changez can choose to completely "Americanize" himself, and continue to create income for himself and his employers, or try to understand who he is in a societal atmosphere suddenly against him. All his decisions make sense, he is a character of deep integrity, and Ahmed's portrayal brings Changez to life.

The supporting characters don't come off as well. Kiefer Sutherland is getting comfortable in his character acting, taking on supporting roles in better films, but his Jim Cross is castrated in regards to Changez's problems. He blames it on everything but the truth of profiling, which doesn't jibe with his established character before those events. Kate Hudson (as a brunette!) is flat-out conflicted on how to play her girlfriend character, undecided between love, her tragic past and her unfortunate decision to exploit their relationship in art. She doesn't seem to understand Erica.

The present day Pakistan sequence, with Liev Schreiber as a sweaty reporter in a "Casablanca"-type setting, is fascinating in its deception but doesn't satisfy on the follow through. The CIA is presented almost like an episode of C.S.I., with high-tech surveillance and trigger-happy readiness. There is a petering out of the centerpiece conflict rather than an ending, which isn't as strong as the rest of the story. It does place Changez in the here and now, and perhaps we can draw our own conclusions, given the mirror that the film has held up to that point.



Mentor and Mentee: Jim (Kiefer Sutherland) Takes Changez Under His Wing in 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist'  
Photo credit: IFC Films

In the example of the recent Boston incident, when a hyper-competitive media – both mainstream and social – used speculation instead of facts, the story of an individual like Changez never ends. The tendency to marginalize certain religions, races and countries in the name of our own fears is not going away anytime soon, unless Americans can understand that even in all these differences, people are generally the same. As John F. Kennedy said 50 years ago about the Russian people (our perceived enemy), "...our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's futures. And we are all mortal."

And that is the strength of the film, for 130 minutes of reflection in what it means to be within another person's shoes – a person thrown into an extraordinary circumstance through no fault of his own, desperately trying to understand what it all means. Not only for himself, but the future of everything around him.

*"The Reluctant Fundamentalist" continues its limited release in Chicago on May 3rd. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Riz Ahmed, Kate Hudson, Kiefer Sutherland, Liev Schreiber and Om Puri. Screenplay adapted by William Wheeler. Directed by Mira Nair. Rated "R"*



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