With the help of *Between the World and Me*, *I am Malala*, *Blue Sweater, Sisneros* (2008) and the movie, *Hotel Rwanda*, I have: 1) recognized changes to my approach in addressing cultural issues throughout this course; 2) analyzed how cultural differences, worldviews, and social construction have made me question my thoughts on diversity; 3) considered how my studies will influence future actions and/or growth; 4) examined the ways that I can engage myself in global change processes; 5) found ways to feel compelled to work as a change agent and discovered ways to sharpen these skills; and 6) explored how I will further my education on cultures, communities, and groups that are different from mine.

The biggest change I noticed in my approach towards addressing cultural issues stemmed from the message depicted in *Blue Sweater*, specifically that my interpretation and perception of foreign aid has shifted. One of the common global ‘cultural issues’ that I have encountered is how foreign aid is portrayed as this great act of service and without it, there is no hope for the local people. However, with the help of the author, Jacqueline Novogratz’s experiences, she tells a completely different story of what foreign aid means for the local community. I was surprised when Novogratz agreed with the local women’s views on the negatives associated with foreign aid, Novogratz’ leaving her position, and her acknowledgement of the impact the local community had on her when stating that she would not help unless specially called upon by the local community. This understanding of foreign aid is completely opposite to what is often heard in Western society in that there is this image that in order for anything good to happen anywhere on the African continent Westerners, especially Americans, must be involved. I think that through the novel, the author really demonstrates how this is not the case by explaining the power and determination of these women and depicting the fact that these communities can come together to create something that was/is not originally thought possible. With this in mind, I think that foreign aid needs to change how it operates to encourage local leadership from within. I think local control will encourage hope and determination in communities that have not always had the chance do so.

In terms of cultural differences, worldview, and social construction, how I think about diversity has changed. For example, I have come to realize and question how diversity is not always encouraged, mainly through the promotion of ethnocentrism (the belief that one’s own culture is best) that is deeply engrained in many societies. As such, if someone is not a member of the perceived ‘superior culture’ (often due to race, gender, sexual orientation, and/or religion), they might be subjected to societal discrimination and oppression based on cultural differences deemed inferior. As a result, not being among the ‘superior culture’, one’s identity might be skewed, further influencing their worldview. That is, these individuals may resent how society constructs the way others view them, thus influencing the way they identify themselves.

Based on what I have learned from this class about multiculturalism, oppression, stereotypes, identity, race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation issues, and disabilities, my future will be impacted in three main ways. First, I will apply this knowledge to other classes. As part of a PBS Certificate in Global Studies, I am taking classes which often focus on how race, gender, and religion play a hand in maintaining stereotypes, contribute to discrimination and oppression, and impact self and/or group identity. Second, I will be able to use my knowledge of discrimination and oppression as a working professional to ensure that I do not participate or encourage it in my place of business. From studying abroad, I have seen firsthand the dangers associated with pretending that racism/ethnicism does not exist. It will be important that I, and my co-workers, understand that it exists in society and to be intentional about not promoting discrimination and oppression. Third, I will apply firsthand the knowledge that I have learned about allies as I have a better understanding of what it takes to be an ally to an ally.

I see myself engaged in global change processes through my future job(s). I am working towards securing a job with the U.S. State Department on a NGO where I can travel and find opportunities to improve the lives of refugees and asylum seekers. I have gained some experience by attending a migration and refugee conference in Sweden. I want to attend such conferences, as an American embassy or NGO employee, to development strategies that improve relationships between the ‘dominant’ society and refugee and asylum populations in order to diminish false stereotypes and to discover solutions to overcome systems of discrimination and oppression that these communities often face.

Correspondingly, one of the ways that I will be engaged in global change processes is through being a change agent – but even more specifically by becoming an ally to allies. Before reading Ayvazian (1995), I had not really considered the toll many allies face daily. For example, I had not considered how overwhelming being an ally might be (e.g., constantly stopping the spread of false stereotypes and recognizing their own advantages), possibly causing allies to feel isolated from family, friends, and society at large. Furthermore, if they are allies for a cause that the dominant society disagrees with, many may feel personal backlash from the dominant society that they themselves are apart of. That is why, due to their valuable work in trying to diminish (and overtime, eliminate) discrimination or oppression, I am compelled to start learning about how I can be an ally to an ally so that they can continue promoting and advocating for those communities facing backlash. With this in mind, my first steps towards becoming an ally to allies will include 1) continuing to research ways to be a better ally (e.g., attending educational sessions on working to become a better listener) and 2) seeking opportunities to learn from other allies (e.g., meeting with allies to hear what they would specifically want from another ally). As a result, I believe that I will have the chance to enhance my intercultural engagement skills (possibly working with those outside of my own culture), my communication skills (i.e., be a better listener), and my advocacy skills.

Finally, I would say that ways I can actually see myself continuing to learn about other cultures, communities, and groups different from my own is through traveling. To me, traveling is about having an opportunity to interact with people who speak a different language or practice a different religion from me. By forcing myself to constantly travel and step out of my comfort zone of speaking only English or only being around privileged white young Americans, I will be able to continue to grow, to learn from others, and to recognize that I do face certain advantages (e.g., being white and American) and disadvantages (e.g., being female) in life. Furthermore, by continuing to travel, I believe I will have opportunities to self reflect and will begin to more easily recognize areas of oppression so that I can step back so as to not participate in the discrimination. I believe this is important as “[i]t is when we either ignore the issues others face or when we think we know it all when discrimination strikes hardest” (MAS 620 Module 5 Molly Carter’s Discussion Board Post).

In closing, this course has given me the knowledge and skills to go from being a thinker to a doer.