

Prompt:

Duke University seeks a talented, engaged student body that embodies the wide range of human experience; we believe that the diversity of our students makes our community stronger. If you'd like to share a perspective you bring or experiences you've had to help us understand you better—perhaps related to a community you belong to or your family or cultural background—we encourage you to do so. Real people are reading your application, and we want to do our best to understand and appreciate the real people applying to Duke. (250-word limit)

Essay:

People often wonder “what I am.” I’m not sure if it’s the Kumma (embroidered Omani cap) that I sometimes wear or the brown skin that shines beneath my hoodie, but it’s never been a question that I’ve been able to avoid. Luckily, the answer is simple: I am of Afghan-Indian-Pashtun descent.

Oh! But I was born (and have always lived in) Oman — you know, “the country next to Dubai.” On second thought, maybe the answer isn’t so simple.

Were I to attempt a more detailed answer, I think I’d begin at home. Before all else, the intertwined (yet fiercely diverse) community of my Omani hometown is a spectacle itself. We hold monthly communal events — festivals like Navratri, Hanukkah, Easter, and even historic events such as the National Day of Oman. Though my genetics cross country lines, I identify most closely with my Omani upbringing.

Because of Oman’s position as a neutral country between warring neighbors, I’ve witnessed a wide spread of socioeconomic and political conflicts first-hand. Though my home is largely unscathed, even a peek into the horrid conditions that surround us is enough to scar.

I stand at the intersection of this tension, caught in a tug-of-war — my unique experiences with conflict allow me to relate with most every culture, yet I am granted privileges that others are denied. Indeed, my aspiration to become a humanitarian engineer is heavily linked to these conflicts, and to the lack of basic human rights in India and Afghanistan.