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With **GROWTH** Comes **DISCOMFORT:**

Lessons From Law School in a Foreign Jurisdiction

I remember staring at my screen during the awards ceremony at the 28th Willem C. Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot – my name was on there, coupled with the text “third runner up for best individual oralist”. My feelings oscillated between surprise and joy (and more surprise!) but my proud moment came from the fact that an Egyptian finally landed this award, and that that Egyptian was me.

I was introduced to the Vis Moot for the first time when I was interning at the Shalakany Law Office prior to attending law school at McGill University. I would see the strenuous effort exerted by the law students and their coaches in preparation for Vienna. I would have never anticipated that fast-forward a couple of years, I would be part of an incredible team myself eventually winning an award at Vis. Dreaming about an award at the Vis was - for me - the law student equivalent of dreaming about an Oscar.

I feel that as law students studying in a foreign jurisdiction we have a tendency to downplay our potential and capabilities. Although McGill University was my first choice, with that choice

came a challenging academic curriculum: at McGill, you study both the common and the civil law simultaneously in a transsystemic environment and you eventually graduate with both a JD and a BCL. But the biggest challenge for me was knowing that I was surrounded by brilliant and accomplished minds. From the get-go, I was uncomfortable to speak in a class of 100+ students, in a foreign language... about Canadian constitutional law (I knew very little about Egyptian constitutionalism to begin with). You feel the spotlight is always on you and you would rather stay quiet than to make a grammatical error or voice your opinion. The imposter syndrome is very real.

When I would second guess my potential, a friend of mine would reassure me that the “right room isn’t comfortable”, and this was probably the best piece of advice I was given. A couple of months in, I decided to put myself out there and to change the narrative in my head. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by my peers, I was inspired by them. I started reaching out to my professors, not feeling embarrassed about asking the questions that would seemingly have “obvious” answers” when I couldn’t grapple with concepts that didn’t make sense to me – and I am happy I did. I also realized that my Egyptian background is the backbone of my poly-jural approach to law. Having been raised in Egypt provided me with the requisite global mindedness and culture sensitivity that have proven very useful in the classes, activities, and practice areas that interest me (yes, international arbitration is definitely on that list).

I guess all this is to say that as law students studying in foreign jurisdictions, we shouldn’t be afraid of being flexible to change and to view discomfort as an opportunity for growth. Perhaps the next Egyptian law student to place at the Vis Moot will not be surprised at their win as I was.