Fifth time. This was my fifth time visiting New York City. As a foreign passport holder and a non-US resident, I made quite a lot of trips to this megalopolis. I know some American friends who have never been to New York City in their entire lives. Am I the lucky one? I threw this question to myself again while watching the skyline of the City approaching to the train. Every time I step onto the streets of Manhattan, faceless dizziness overwhelms me. Like my last visit, as soon as I found the way out of Penn Station, gray skyscrapers greeted me. They were still standing there, quietly, looking down at the swarming streets. More or less, New York City reminded me of Seoul and Shanghai — although it would be more appropriate to say the latter two are the replicas of the Big Apple. No matter how long I have lived in Seoul or how many times I have visited New York City, I can never get used to this kind of atmosphere. Yes, big cities are exciting, but at the same time intimidating. I would be the last one in this planet who would wear an ‘I love NY’ T-shirt. The National Model United Nations (NMUN) Conference was like New York City at first. My excitement for the opening ceremony did not last long. After hurriedly stuffing Big Mac into my stomach, I walked into the first session of the General Assembly (GA) 2nd Committee fifteen minutes late. And I encountered déjà vu. The other delegations were quietly seating, seemingly knowing what to do. In the middle of roll call, I was just lost. I felt so unprepared. I thought the atmosphere in the ballroom was very intimidating.

Weekly meetings — many of which were informative and stimulating lectures — and position papers de facto improved my understandings on Libya and its stance on current global issues. I am still surprised how comfortable I am talking about Libyan diplomacy which I started from zero knowledge. The problem was the rules and procedures. Even though I was fortunate enough to have Helen, a veteran partner, with me, I could not figure
out how heavily I should weigh on each procedure. I carefully followed motions on the floor, and tried to get used to technical terms that were being used. It would have been the best learning opportunity, only if the session were not real. When the chair announced the first motion to suspend the meeting for the purpose of caucusing to be in order, I just did not have an idea what to do. All I could do was to follow my trustful partner Helen. The first thing we should do was even clear to me: find an ally or allies. But, how? I shouted out “AU!” which meant “African Union!” Yet, I soon had to remind myself that there were at least 150 delegations in the GA 2nd Committee, and there were already numerous blocs formed at each corner of the room. Helen and I formed our own circle with Kenya, Tanzania, and several other African states, but could not bring all African Union member states together. Helen did not seem to really care. She was already talking with ‘Kenya’ about setting orders of agendas. I was still concerned about the other groups. There were a few delegations debating at the center of each circle, while the majority was listening. It seemed impossible to break into those circles and lead them to consensus that was more favorable to us. The caucusing was short, and the majority voted for the first agenda to be discussed primarily. The first agenda was about Climate Change Economics, which we as a delegation from Libyan Arab Jamahiriya kept at the bottom of our list. My first session in the NMUN went by fairly quickly. We as Libyan delegates did not gain anything, and I as an individual was still intimidated, I thought.

The second and third days of the conference were the repetition of the first session. Frustrating process of motions and votes were followed by a long period of caucusing. Thirty to ninety-minute caucusing went by incredibly fast. Considering how divided African states were upon setting the order of agendas just a day before, delegations from Africa showed unbelievable collaboration from the second day. Even though there were two separate working papers among African states – simply because there were two laptops – the two
blocs were very supportive to each other. Most of African states were sponsors or signatories of both working papers. Libyan Arab Jamahiriya sponsored the “Framework for Future” with about a dozen of other African states such as Algeria, Botswana, Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. We also became a signatory for the other African working paper sponsored by Nigeria and Mauritania. My fellow delegates in the other committee sessions seemed to have a much harder time uniting consensus among African states. It might be the particularity of discussed agenda, Climate Change Economics that enabled more uniform and stronger voice throughout the continent. However, our working paper did not necessarily blame industrialized countries for the historical build-up of green house gases. We rather tried to be inclusive to both developed and developing states, being receptive to most of amendments brought up during the caucusing. Hence, the majority of delegations which we needed to negotiate with was not African. In order to take full advantage of academic knowledge on regional studies, I dealt with Asian countries while Helen was persuading Latin American states. I could also adhere to the practical stance of Libya based on the conversation with Ambassador Dabbashi. Libya’s flexible position on the alternative energy enabled us to work with more progressive blocs such as one led by Japan. At the same time, as an oil-producing country, we could engage in constructive discussions with OPEC member states as well. We merged our working paper with Oman’s and Qatar’s. When we turned in our final version of draft resolution to the chair, we already had more than one hundred sponsors and signatories.

By Friday, I was acting like I had done MUN for ten years. My nervousness on the first day was completely gone. I could finally have more private conversation with the other delegates in my committee. I also visited the other committee sessions to see how they were doing. Thinking back then, my first session was not so fruitless. Libyan Arab Jamahiriya did make ties with a few but very important allies such as Kenya during the first session, and I also adapted into the chaotic but political atmosphere of the GA 2nd Committee. The voting
procedure on Friday was relatively easier despite greater unfamiliarity. In addition to Helen’s explanation, I familiarized myself to the procedure within three resolutions. By 6:30PM, while the session was being delayed for an hour and half, I was beginning to be more concerned about my empty stomach. At seven o’clock, Helen and I decided to leave the room. Among thirteen draft resolutions, twelve had already passed in the GA 2nd Committee.

Dinner at Nomad was an experience. I never imagined a North African restaurant to be that fancy. Like NMUN, African or Arabic cuisines were a whole new experience to me. I had to study every dish before I figured out how to eat. This was probably one thing I liked about New York City: variety of food. Every day during the conference, Mert and I spent entire dinner time looking for nice, affordable restaurants. We always walked all the way down to the Second Avenue, striving for a nice and fulfilling dinner. It certainly eased my stress and tension which otherwise had to be dealt with caffeine and alcohol. Nomad was definitely a great place to conclude our day, apart from the number of incidents we had to come across on the way back to the hotel; unfortunately, I had to reaffirm my stance on New York City that there were still menacing factors both on the ground and under the ground.

On the last day of the conference, New York City was still giving me a headache with its enormity; plus, it was raining. On the other hand, I was overly comfortable with all the NMUN procedures. I did not expect to learn so many things in such a short period of time, but I eventually recognized that the NMUN Conference was one of the best learning experiences I ever had in college. There is such a huge gap between mere knowledge and actual experience. NMUN gave me very practical insights regarding international diplomacy. For me, the highlight of the conference was Saturday’s voting. Our resolution passed on the floor by 106-17-32 in the General Assembly Plenary. It was an especially rewarding moment. It was also fun to press the button and watch the vote being casted on the board. As the GA Plenary in the morning perfectly summed up my NMUN Conference, I personally did not
feel any discontent about leaving early. In part, I was even glad to be back in Syracuse before midnight. My only regret was that this was my first and last NMUN experience, and that I would be able to do so much better next time, but there would be no next time as a Syracuse University delegate. With contradictory feelings, I got off the train with my luggage on one hand and an umbrella that I bought in the UN souvenir shop on the other hand. Fortunately, it was neither snowing nor raining in Syracuse.