



Achren Verdian

Profession: **News anchor**

Company: **France 24**

Location: **Paris, France**

SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON THE WORLD

*Achren Verdian promotes global awareness
in pursuit of journalistic excellence*

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Seated inside the newsroom studio of France 24 in the Parisian suburb of Issy-les-Moulineaux, Achren Verdian is anchoring the day's news with a calm poise. The director's voice suddenly crackles into her earpiece with an urgent breaking report of an explosion in the 11th arrondissement. Minutes pass—then another report of a bomb near the Stade de France in Saint-Denis. During the next hour, as the world learned the details of what would become the deadliest coordinated terrorist attacks on French soil in more than half a century, a remarkably composed Verdian reported on the mass shootings and hostage standoff with the eyes of the world watching. During the weeks that followed, Verdian worked tirelessly, reporting on the aftermath of the attacks and ensuing police manhunt that gripped the nation.

At France 24, Verdian is surrounded by nearly 400 journalists hailing from more than 40 nations—all dedicated to the

twenty-four hour news channel's public service mission to broadcast world news in English, French and Arabic to all four corners of the globe. In that stimulating multicultural environment, Verdian feels right at home she says, pursuing her passion for a career ideally suited to her interests and global conscience. "I feel extremely lucky to be able to wake up every morning," she insists, "and look forward to a job I love."

Born and raised in Paris, Verdian is a fourth generation French-Armenian. She describes her Armenian heritage and AGBU in particular as a major part of her identity. From the age of 3, Verdian attended AGBU Alex Manoogian Saturday School where she learned to speak Armenian and developed a greater awareness of the culture she had been exposed to at home. "When I was a teenager I always felt extremely privileged to be lucky enough to have a second life after my French school," she says, "as I had my Armenian classes, dance, theater and poetry—a rich double culture that other French children didn't have, so I always felt very proud of that and

tried to cultivate and preserve that Armenian dimension."

As Verdian matured, she developed an interest in world affairs and not surprisingly given her Armenian heritage, a deep sense of empathy towards those who suffer injustice. At the time, however, journalism was not her first career choice. Instead she dreamed of working either in the diplomatic service or for the United Nations and decided to apply to the AGBU Summer Internship Program in New York (NYSIP). Through NYSIP, Verdian acquired valuable experience as an intern at the Center for International Conflict Resolution at Columbia University. While there, she seized the opportunity to attend a meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss the Darfur crisis, but quickly became disillusioned with the slow pace of diplomatic debate and national self-interest. Verdian then decided to obtain her master's degree in international relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

It was at that point she discovered jour-

nalism and applied for an unpaid internship at the BBC World Service—Africa section in London. Not having any connections in the media world, it wasn't easy getting her foot in the door, but her persistence eventually won over the hiring manager. "I called every day for one month," remembers Verdian, "and finally they took me! I wasn't paid but it was a very fulfilling position because I felt like I was going beyond the news of the day to raise awareness about regions and conflicts that we don't often hear about."

Verdian advises young journalists to consider an unpaid internship just as she did—as a way to develop not only valuable hands on experience but also meet critical connections that can help secure a more permanent position in the future. Like many other successful journalists, she also recommends not necessarily attending journalism school in favor of developing another field of expertise—whether it be international relations, medicine, or law for example—that will help distinguish yourself in a highly competitive environment. And it is essential she adds, "to take nothing for granted, always question the information and verify every detail on your own."

A willingness to work exceptional amounts of overtime is also not just valued but expected as a journalist. Over the course of the past seven years at France 24, Verdian has worked almost every shift, including overnights and weekends—often waking up at 3 in the morning to meet the demands of a 24-hour news channel. She continues to be motivated by that same passion to shed light on underreported and neglected stories in order to help inform and empower others, especially those who live in regions of the world where free speech is not guaranteed and an independent media does not exist. "When people write through social media from countries such as the Central African Republic or Burundi to express their thanks for providing objective information," she acknowledges, "it's rewarding to receive those messages, but it also makes me realize the extent to which the media can help educate and help people."

Among the feature reports of which she is particularly proud is a recent documentary about the hidden Armenians in Eastern Turkey—those who remained in Turkey after the Genocide and were forced to convert to Islam and assimilate into Turkish society. The report explores the complicated process by which their grandchildren and great-grandchildren discover their Armenian ancestry, struggle to come to terms with where they belong and reconcile, with no small amount of courage, with their Armenian heritage. "When I came across information about these Armenians," says Verdian, "I was fascinated because until then the narrative about the genocide we all learned in school was very clear cut: either the Armenians were killed during the Genocide or they survived as Armenians in the diaspora. The

Armenians who survived as Turks and Kurds were not part of the national consciousness, because their melding of identities was difficult to understand."

Verdian's documentary garnered widespread praise in France and from all over the diaspora—including from many Armenians, who like her were fascinated to learn that Armenians remained in Eastern Turkey and welcomed the recognition of this largely forgotten, but vital chapter in the historical narrative on the Armenian Genocide.

The opportunity to seek out the voices of those we seldom hear and shed light on their untold stories continues to motivate and inspire Achren Verdian, who continues to use her own voice as a journalist to reflect the diversity of human experience. @



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