

## Hasna Aitboulahcen, from 'party girl' to suspected terrorist



© DH.BE | Hasna Aitboulahcen was killed in a police raid in the northern Paris suburb of Saint-Denis on November 18, 2015, targeting her "cousin" and suspected mastermind of the Paris attacks, Abdelhamid Abaaoud

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**Hasna Aitboulahcen, who was killed in a police raid in a suburb of Paris following last week's deadly attacks in the French capital, has been described by friends and neighbours as a former party girl who only became radicalised six months ago.**

Police launched a major raid targeting Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the suspected architect of the Paris attacks, in the northern suburb Saint-Denis in the early hours of Wednesday morning.

In a widely circulated amateur video of the assault, a man's voice shouts, "Where is your boyfriend?" to which a woman responds, "He's not my boyfriend!" before a barrage of gunfire and a loud explosion can be heard.

Although officials initially stated they believed Aitboulahcen was a suicide bomber, the Paris prosecutor's office said on Friday that she had not blown herself up. Three people were killed in the raid, including Aitboulahcen, Abaaoud - who she claimed was her cousin - and an unidentified third person, while eight were arrested.

Following news of her death, neighbours and friends painted a picture of Aitboulahcen as a troubled, former party girl who only became radicalised six months ago.

"(She was) chatty, a fast talker, and a little crazy, unstable. She would jump in front of you and just begin to rap," one neighbour, Sofiane, told AFP.

Others remembered her wearing a "little cowboy hat and boots", while some described her as a tomboy who stayed out late drinking and smoking at parties.

"She had a *joie de vivre*, she enjoyed life and, like I said, was a person who was in a bad place and who was influenced by these assassins," Khemissa, who said she was a childhood friend of Aitboulahcen's, told French daily Le Parisien.

### 'She's lost'

Aitboulahcen apparently led a very turbulent childhood. One of four children, she was born on August 12, 1989, in the northwestern Paris suburb Clichy-la-Garenne to Moroccan parents. Her mother and father separated early on, and she was placed in foster care at the age of eight.

"In the beginning, everything went well. She was a child like any other," a woman who identified herself as Aitboulahcen's foster mother told AFP under the condition of anonymity.

But as she entered adolescence, Aitboulahcen began acting out, according to her foster mother, who said that "she only did what she wanted", sometimes yelling, while at other times refusing to speak at all. After seven years with her foster family, she abruptly left at the age of 15.

"When she left, I said to myself: 'She's lost,'" her foster mother remembered.

Although Aitboulahcen's father lived in the northeastern town of Creutzwald where he worked for French automaker PSA Peugeot Citroën, it is believed that she spent most of her teenage years with her mother in the suburbs of Paris.

"Growing up, she lacked reference points and in the end chose not to care, running away more and more and hanging out with the wrong crowd," a man who said he was her brother told French media, also under the condition of anonymity.

In 2013, Aitboulahcen briefly managed a construction company run out of the northern Paris suburb Epinay-sur-Seine, but the firm went bankrupt less than 10 months later, official registry of company filings show.

### 'Brainwashed'

Although it is not clear what caused Aitboulahcen's sudden radicalisation, the man who identified himself as her brother said that she began wearing a *jilbab*, a full length garment worn by some Muslim women, around six months ago, before trading that in for a *niqab*, or full Islamic veil.

"She was in her own bubble, she wasn't at all looking to study the religion, I never saw her open a Koran," he told AFP.

Aitboulahcen's mother also noticed the dramatic change in her daughter's behaviour, telling AFP that the young woman had been "brainwashed", and refused to listen to advice.

"She was always on her smartphone using Facebook and Whatsapp. 'You live your life and I'll live mine', she would say," Aitboulahcen's mother recalled.


She apparently posted a photo of herself on a now-obsolete Facebook page along with the message, "I will soon be going to Syria, God willing" in June, according to French media reports.

In the end, it was Aitboulahcen who helped lead police to the apartment in Saint-Denis where Wednesday's raid took place. Already under surveillance as part of a separate drugs investigation, investigators tracked her phone to where she and Abaaoud were holed up. Police fired more than 5,000 bullets during the assault, which lasted over seven hours.




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