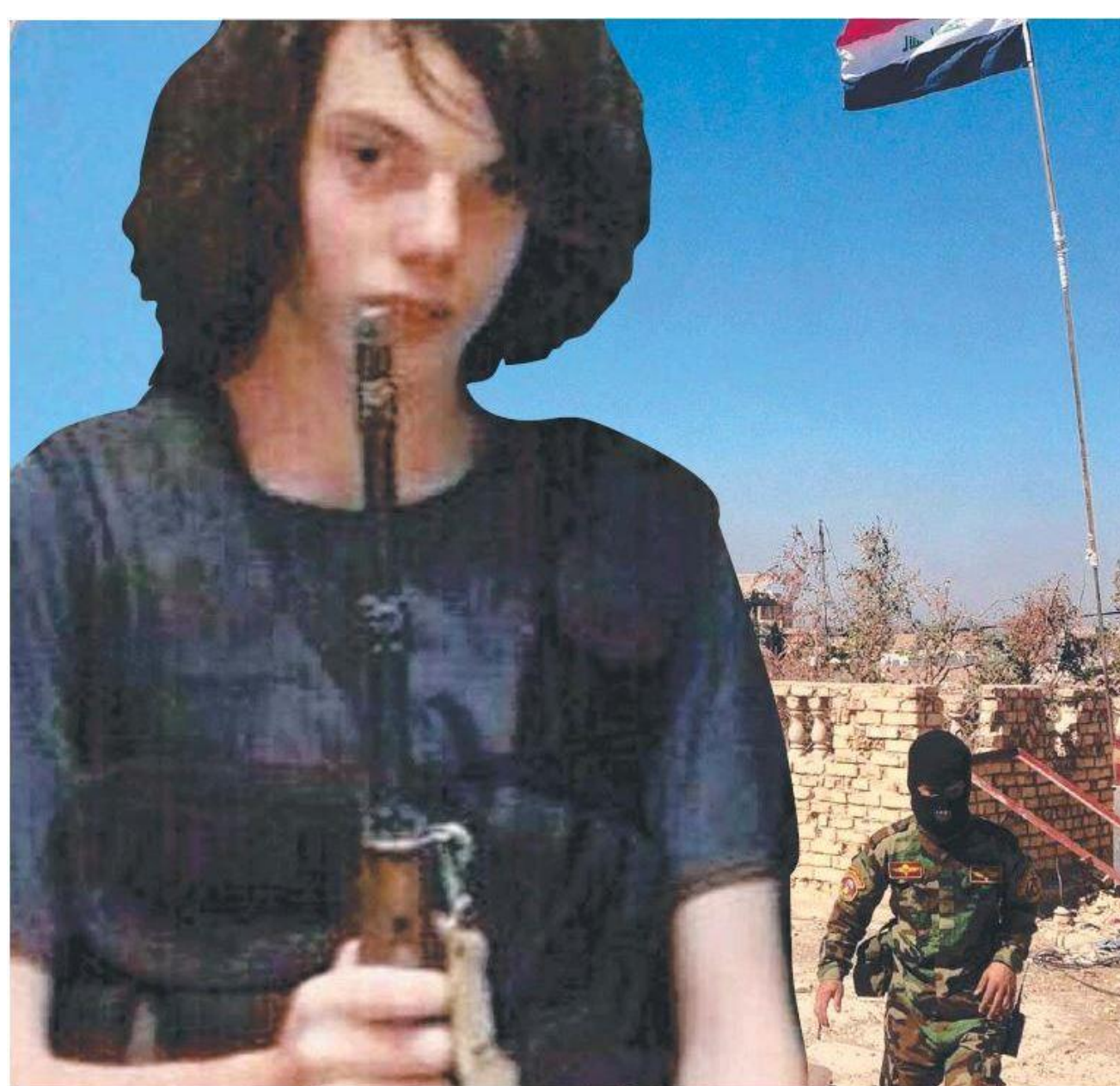




# Lives lost when lies become a sick reality



**J**AKE Bilardi, the Melbourne teenager who blew himself up in a suicide bomb last week, described Australia as “a land full of such filth and corruption that no one in their right mind could live there without a craving to let some heads roll”.

It’s a craving he certainly showed in his blog and various tweets.

That material has given us some insight into how adolescents, Western-born and raised, can be radicalised in the name of Islam to kill innocent people and die in the process.

As he was waiting for his suicide mission, Jake wrote that it would help Islamic State “launch large assaults and make big gains”. In fact it seems there were no fatalities from his car explosion. Certainly, it did nothing to alter the battle for Ramadi in Iraq.

When Jake was loaded up with explosives and sent on his suicide mission by Islamic State, it was not to kill Americans, it was not to kill Christians or Jews. Jake was sent out to kill fellow Muslims. Perhaps



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in his view, they were the wrong kind of Muslims — Shi’ite rather than Sunni — but they were followers of the same faith that he had recently embraced.

Islamic State is one group out of many that claim to represent the “pure” form of Islam that it is attempting to establish across Syria and Iraq. What singles it out is its slick publicity machine. It has been particularly effective in using the internet to dramatise bloodthirsty crimes such as beheading and crucifixion. There are other extreme Islamist groups fighting in Iraq and Syria such as the al-Qaeda franchise, Al-Nusra, but they have not developed the same propaganda appeal to Western youth. Many groups have claimed to

represent “true” or “pure” Islam and tried to establish Islamic states. This was the basis on which Ayatollah Khomeini swept to power in Iran. That is a Shi’ite regime. In Egypt it was the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood of Mohamed Morsi. In Afghanistan it is the Taliban. The divisions over who should lead an Islamic state are as old as the division between the Shi’ite and Sunni branches of the faith.

So how does a boy from the suburbs of Melbourne come to die a futile death in a religious war in a foreign land?

There are usually some common themes. First is the idea that Muslims are somehow persecuted on a global scale. Jake said he “investigated” the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which led to his “disdain” for the United States. No mention that the attack on the World Trade Centre might have led to some disdain for Islamic terrorism.

He said the conflict between Israel and Palestine was a “David and Goliath” story. It’s a common

theme — in the middle of the whole Arab-Muslim world, the problem is a Jewish state. Although Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia are all governed by Muslims, there is always a grievance that “real” Muslims are persecuted because the rulers are the wrong kind of Muslims or puppets of the West in some form or fashion.

**T**HE next idea is that when the facts don’t fit that explanation, it is only because media coverage is presenting a false reality. Jake said, “I was beginning to learn that what the media was feeding us was nothing but a government-sponsored distortion of reality”.

Once you decide that you can’t believe anything you see or read in the free and open press, then it is only the “Brothers” online who can give you the real facts. Their propaganda becomes your reality. The outside world closes down. You are now living in their virtual world. Next is the idea that Western

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society is evil and corrupt. Jake cited “systematic genocide in my own country”. It’s hard to know what he meant by this. Possibly he was referring to Aboriginal people, but as non-Muslims — kaffirs — they rarely feature in the concerns of jihadis. It is possible it was some imagined persecution of Muslims.

Jake said: “I was growing tired of the corruption and filthiness of Australian society and yearned to live under the Islamic State”. In fact he decided to die under the Islamic State.

All the evidence is that most of the Australian jihadis who live under Islamic State want to get out at the first decent opportunity. Making them suicide bombers therefore serves everyone’s

purpose. Apart from those they are trying to kill.

A big difference between our society and an Islamist one is the capacity for self-doubt and open criticism. We believe that doubting something and subjecting it to scrutiny is the best way to get to the truth. That is the scientific method. Some alienated young people might misunderstand that diet of critical analysis as evidence of a weak and corrupt society compared with their idealised “pure” religious society that brooks no criticism and has all the answers.

We cannot feed the young on criticism alone. Australia is one of the most successful, open, prosperous, accepting societies that the world has ever known. Being born here is one of the best things that could ever happen in a person’s life. That is worth explaining as part of immunising the young against the false political claims of extremists.

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