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Decolonising Criminology: Syed Hussein Alatas on Crimes of the Powerful

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Abstract
Like the rest of the social sciences, criminology is dominated by Western scholars, literature and perspectives. This Westerncentrism of criminology means that non-Western criminological scholarship has largely been marginalised or ignored. This article contributes toward the ongoing efforts to decolonise criminology by arguing that the Malaysian intellectual, Syed Hussein Alatas (1928–2007), is worthy of greater inclusion in criminological research and teaching due to his pioneering scholarship. More specifically, Alatas deserves greater recognition within the criminological subfield of 'crimes of the powerful', an area within criminology which has been at the forefront of challenging the criminological status quo but which remains somewhat parochial. This article introduces Alatas' most notable works and explains their relevance for contemporary criminology.

Introduction

In 1939, Edwin Sutherland (1940 [1939]) warned that criminologists have underappreciated the harm caused by powerful figures. This would lead to the birth of a new branch of criminology that was specifically focused on 'white-collar crime' (Dervan and Podgor 2016; Simpson and Weisburd 2009). In more recent years, criminologists emulating Sutherland's approach have developed refined studies that focus on 'crimes of the powerful' (Friedrichs and Rothe 2011; Pearce and Snider 1992; Tombs and Whyte 2003; Tombs and Whyte 2015; Whyte 2009). Although there is now a well-established subfield within criminology that focuses on crimes of the powerful, criminology is still dominated by studies on what may be called 'low-level crime', 'everyday crime', 'street crime' or 'crimes of the powerless'. One estimate has suggested that as little as 3% of publications in the most reputable criminology journals are about crimes of the powerful (Michalowski and Kramer 2006: 6). The relatively scarce literature about crimes of the powerful that does exist is not without its limitations either. Like other subfields of criminology, crimes of the powerful scholarship remains mostly Westerncentric in that it is typically based on Western concerns, perspectives and literature. This scenario is somewhat disappointing when one

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considers that those who specialise in crimes of the powerful 'have been especially active in challenging the limitations of conventional criminological frameworks' (Friedrichs and Rothe 2011: 242). The Westerncentrism of criminology is problematic not only because it is discriminatory, but also because it unnecessarily excludes alternative accounts that may be useful for informing criminological scholarship, as Kitossa (2012: 209) has explained: '[T]he valorization of Westernized theorizing in teaching, research and publishing limits serious engagement with alternative and oppositional theorizing on crime'. Decolonising criminology is worthwhile then because it may lead to new agendas, analyses and proposals, such as focusing on topics that criminologists have thus far insufficiently examined but which are priorities in the non-West, such as colonialism, imperialism and slavery, as well as due to the prospects of new insights into understanding crime, justice and punishment (Agozino 2010: xii; Carrington et al. 2018: 8; Connell 2006: 249–250, 2007: 37–38; Cunneen 2011; King 2017).

In this article, I advocate the greater inclusion of non-Western scholarship within criminological discussions in the pursuit of decolonising criminology. More specifically, I argue that the scholarship of a Malaysian intellectual named Syed Hussein Alatas (1928–2007) could benefit both the criminological subfield of crimes of the powerful as well as the overall discipline of criminology. Criminologists have seldom cited or taught Alatas even though the unifying theme of his writings is a focus on crimes of the powerful. This is not particularly surprising given that social science scholarship '*almost never* cites non-metropolitan thinkers and *almost never* builds on social theory formulated outside the metropole' (Connell 2007: 64). This is also true for criminology which typically ignores non-Western scholarship even when studying non-Western contexts (Cross 2018). This article seeks to address this unfortunate omission by introducing Alatas' scholarship with the hope that it will encourage criminologists to utilise his work in future teaching and research. This is based on an understanding of 'the global South as a space for the production of knowledge and a source of innovative research and theory on crime and justice' (Carrington et al. 2018: 3–4). This article may also generate a greater desire amongst criminologists to identify other non-Western scholarship that has been neglected even though it has criminological relevance.

Ethnocentrism in the Social Sciences and Criminology

Complaints about ethnocentrism in the social sciences are not new. For several decades, social scientists from the non-West have derided the way in which social science scholarship, syllabi, and pedagogy has privileged Western knowledge as if non-Western perspectives have little value. A common tendency is for social scientists to base their scholarship on Western concerns, experiences and literature, and to generalise this as universally valid in all places (Connell 2006: 258–262, 2007: 44–47). Criticism has been levelled at the way that social scientists overlook the non-West because of a tacit belief that useful knowledge is born in the West and that non-Western societies should emulate Western trajectories if they wish to succeed (Bhambra 2007). The Westerncentrism of the social sciences has been linked to broader patterns of globalised Western hegemony that began in the colonial era but which persist today, within and beyond academia (Santos 2001). For criminology more specifically, its canon is as Western, white and male as any other social science discipline (Aas 2012; Bosworth and Hoyle 2011; Lee and Laidler 2013). The Westerncentrism of criminology is reflected in the fact that the most frequently cited criminologists

are overwhelmingly white men from the USA and the UK (Cohn et al. 2017; Wright 2002; Wright et al. 2000). It is important to stress that the exclusion of non-Western scholarship in criminology is not because non-Western criminology does not exist. Indeed, Japanese, Chinese and Indian criminology is barely known in the West despite criminology having been well established in these countries for several decades (Belknap 2016: 253).

In order to understand why criminology is Westerncentric one must recognise and address at least six chief factors. Firstly, there is a lack of reflexivity amongst some Western criminologists who believe that Westerncentrism is unproblematic due to an orientalist view of the non-West. It has been suggested that being 'intellectually lazy' (Santos 2014: 166) in this way may be more pronounced amongst 'administrative criminologists' who favour a statecentric, applied and positivist approach to understanding crime and who may therefore be less convinced of the importance of revamping their 'scientific' discipline which prioritises policy solutions (Bosworth and Hoyle 2011: 9; Michalowski and Kramer 2006: 6; Tauri 2013). Secondly, non-Western criminologists often emulate and reproduce Westerncentric criminology since most non-Western criminologists are educated in the West and may not problematise the Westerncentrism of criminology (Agozino 2004b: 81–82; Carrington et al. 2016: 3; Carrington and Hogg 2017: 183–184). This may be based on an inferiority complex which results in the reproduction of Western paradigms, theories and concepts, and stifles original theorising that might otherwise occur in the non-West. Thirdly, non-Western criminologists who may produce relevant scholarship may be curtailed by socio-political contexts that include deprivation, censorship and a culmination of a lack of resources, opportunities and academic freedom, all of which lead to the production of a limited criminology (Fasihuddin 2013; Laidler et al. 2017; Lee and Laidler 2013: 147; Liu et al. 2013: 2). These sociological factors can curtail the criminological scholarship that is produced in the non-West and reinforce the marginalisation of non-Western scholarship. Fourthly, a significant portion of non-Western criminology is published in languages other than English which serves as the *lingua franca* of academia and leads to the exclusion of non-English scholarship (Mazenod 2018; Suzuki et al. 2017: 4). Fifthly, neoliberalism and corporatisation dominate academia which leads to academics being pressured to adhere to stringent directives in the interests of efficiency, productivity and financial lucrativeness whilst also being expected to nurture students for industry (Bunds and Giardina 2017; Kidman and Chu 2017; Tombs and Whyte 2003). This precarious and competitive environment is not conducive to overhauling syllabi, exploring new literatures, radical theoretical innovation or epistemological exploration beyond the ordinary and is one of the main reasons why contemporary criminology has been described as 'theoretically light' (Matthews 2017: 579). Sixthly, structural inequalities such as racism and xenophobia remain in universities, scholarly organisations, academic meetings and the publishing industry which leads to the marginalisation and exclusion of non-Western scholars (Belknap 2016: 262; Graf 2010; Kidman and Chu 2017; Medina 2011; Sinha 2005: 200–209). Westerncentrism will thus persist until the gatekeepers that define the field are ready to acknowledge the issue and take practical steps to address it.

There have been attempts to overcome Westerncentrism in criminology but these remain relatively peripheral and so there are still calls for 'the decolonisation of criminology' (Agozino 2004a: 355). One of the first to recognise criminology's Westerncentrism was Stanley Cohen, most notable for his monumental work on folk devils and moral panics. In *Against Criminology* (1988 [1982]: 178–182), Cohen expressed his dissatisfaction with the way in which Western criminology was uncritically transferred to non-Western contexts, especially since crime rates were significantly higher in the West than the non-West. In the same era, Piers Beirne (1983) also warned Western criminologists about making claims to

universality and the associated dangers of ethnocentrism when engaging in comparative criminology. Not long thereafter, Katheryn K. Russell (1992) proposed a 'black criminology' that would involve studying crime from a black perspective and Chris Cunneen (1999) called for a 'postcolonial criminology' which would assess crime's relationship to colonial history. All of these pioneering contributions sought to reconsider criminology's parochialism, to suggest that alternative perspectives were possible, and to invite new voices to join the conversation. In recent years, a number of scholars have reignited the debate about the Westerncentrism of criminology, each offering their own distinct terminology to resolve the problem. This has led to calls for 'counter colonial criminology' (Agozino 2004a: 350), 'transnational criminology' (Bowling 2011; Sheptycki 2008: 15), 'African criminology' (Agozino 2010: vii–viii), 'Asian criminology' (Belknap 2016; Liu 2009; Liu et al. 2013; Liu 2017) and 'Southern criminology' (Carrington et al. 2016; Carrington and Hogg 2017; Carrington et al. 2018; Hogg et al. 2017). These scholars share the same concerns as those who came before them in seeking to decentre criminological knowledge production in order to attain a more inclusive approach to understanding crime, justice and punishment. Despite all of these attempts at decolonising criminology, the field remains Westerncentric.

There are numerous routes to decolonising knowledge production even though this is a complex theoretical undertaking that has pitfalls, limitations and challenges which I will discuss further in forthcoming publications. In this article, I focus on one strategy, which is the promotion of non-Western scholarship that has been overlooked, or that which has been referred to by Raewyn Connell (2007) as 'Southern Theory'. In advocating 'Southern Theory' I wish to correct the misconception that the non-West is not a source of original and important knowledge as Agozino has explained:

> [I]t is not enough to indigenise already existing criminological schools, including progressive criminologies. Instead, western criminologists should remain open to chances of learning from the experiences and struggles of others as well through an exchange of knowledge contrary to the modernist assumption that technology must be transferred from the west to the rest of us (2004a: 356).

In concurring with this argument, I argue that Syed Hussein Alatas is an example of a non-Western scholar who criminologists should engage with due to his significant contributions to understanding criminological topics. Indeed, he may even be worthy of being included in the criminological canon due to his pioneering and innovative scholarship on crimes of the powerful.

Syed Hussein Alatas (1928–2007)

There is misconception that scholars who should be known are known. In fact, there are numerous scholars who have contributed meaningful knowledge throughout the centuries who have been neglected, ignored or forgotten, especially those from the non-West. One would think that someone who has been described as 'one of the founders of sociological investigation in Southeast Asia' (Abaza 2005: 237) would be well-known, but regrettably, Syed Hussein Alatas is still under appreciated in the dominant centres of knowledge production (Graf 2010; Maia 2014). Alatas was of Arab heritage but was born and raised in Indonesia, completed his doctorate in the Netherlands, and subsequently resided within Singapore and Malaysia. Amongst his many notable achievements was establishing the Malay Studies Department at the National University of Singapore in 1967 where he

remained until 1988. Aside from his prolific academic career, Alatas was also a regular contributor to newspapers and magazines in a manner that means he is deserving of the title 'public intellectual', a feat that is impressive given that this was not as common for academics then as it is today. It is also noteworthy because criminologists who focus on crimes of the powerful have not prioritised 'public criminology' to the extent that they perhaps should have (Kramer 2011: 447). Beyond journalistic outputs, Alatas also served as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya and had a stint as an elected politician in Malaysia that did not last long due to his frustration with the political scene. Alatas was an outspoken interdisciplinary scholar who drew upon sociology, history, theology, political science and development studies in order to theorise about the historiography, colonisation and post-colonial development of Southeast Asia. Throughout his work, Alatas blurred the boundary between the colonial and post-colonial eras by capturing the way in which colonial legacies remain in the post-colonial context, particularly in regards to elite wrongdoings. This approach allowed Alatas to incorporate colonialism into his analysis of crime and justice issues in a balanced manner which is not always found in other criminological scholarship which may treat colonialism in an overly deterministic manner or entirely ignore it. Alatas wrote in English and Malay which means that a significant portion of his work is accessible to an international audience but not in its entirety. Today, one can find a generation of scholars in Malaysia, Singapore and elsewhere who remember Alatas fondly and credit him with leaving a profound impact on them due to his dedication to his students and his passion for intellectual exchange.

In his wide-ranging writings, Alatas coincidently developed a body of work concerned with decolonising the social sciences. He was a pioneer in highlighting 'the need for an autonomous social science tradition in Asia and other developing regions' (1972: 11). In this regard, he is not only a good example of a non-Western scholar who can be used to decolonise criminology but he is also useful for exploring the intricacies that surround such efforts. As early as the 1960s, Alatas (1963a, b) was writing about the ways in which Westerncentrism had curtailed an accurate understanding of Southeast Asia, leading him to call for the inclusion of more local perspectives to redress this imbalance. Alatas introduced the notion of the 'captive mind' to refer to the ways in which non-Western intellectuals make themselves subservient to Western knowledge (Alatas 1972, 1974). For this reason, Alatas complained that 'in the world of learning, Asian scholars are still under intellectual domination' (1972: 9–10) and elsewhere referred to this as 'intellectual bondage' (1974: 692). Alatas' frustration with those with a 'captive mind' is reflected in his description of them as 'slave scholars' and 'intellectual compradors' (2000: 29). Alatas advocated the 'creative mind' as a solution to this which involves non-Western scholars being confident in their ability to produce knowledge in a way that does not rely upon Western paradigms or approaches. This is significant because it highlights that Alatas believed that the Westerncentrism that dominates the social sciences is not just a result of Western academics' insularity but is also due to non-Western academics' acquiescence.

Although Alatas supported the notion of decolonising knowledge production, he was not a nativist in the way that some non-Western scholars may be. By this I mean that Alatas did not reject knowledge produced in the West as irrelevant. Instead, Alatas favoured a hybrid approach to knowledge production which is to say that he believed that knowledge produced in the West could still be useful. For example, Alatas' son, Syed Farid Alatas (2005), has argued that his father was receptive to Marxist principles in ways that other postcolonial scholars were not, but not in an uncritical manner that merely sought to imitate Marx. Hence, Alatas wrote: 'As I see it the problem is not to avoid the Western world of learning but to assimilate it in a selective and constructive manner' (1974: 697). Indeed,

Alatas retained this stance throughout his career, remarking later that '[w]e should assimilate as much [knowledge] as possible from all sources, from all parts of the world, all useful knowledge. But we need to do this with an independent critical spirit, without turning our backs on our own intellectual heritage' (2000: 27). This balanced approach seems sensible given that decolonising knowledge is about inclusion rather than exclusion. More specifically for criminology, it has been observed that Western criminological theories can have explanatory power for understanding crime and justice issues in non-Western contexts (Suzuki et al. 2017). Thus, decolonising criminology should not be misunderstood as the erasure of Western criminology.

Alatas on Crimes of the Powerful

Although Alatas did not identify as a criminologist, he is still relevant for criminology in the same way that Karl Marx and Michel Foucault were not criminologists but regularly underpin criminological understanding. Those who doubt Alatas' relevance for criminology may exhibit a Westerncentric prejudice against scholarship from the non-West which results in having higher demands of non-Western scholarship. Furthermore, if we are to decolonise criminology then we may need to explore literature which is not obviously criminological due to a possible dearth of non-Western criminology (Brown 2018: 93; Laidler et al. 2017). There are numerous reasons why criminologists ought to pay attention to Alatas though and the first is perhaps the most obvious, which is that criminological themes were central to his scholarship, which typically focused on political elites' contraventions of justice. More specifically, he examined abuses of power in colonial and postcolonial societies which caused social harm and often strayed into criminality. In one instance, Alatas (2000: 44) identified the main challenges facing (post-)colonial societies as corporate crime, cronyism, political misdemeanour, corruption, and suppression, all of which are criminological topics. In his characteristic style that sits somewhere between wit and sarcasm, Alatas (1977: 35–39; 2006: 17) introduced the idea of 'the sociology of the fools' as a way of studying political elites' wrongdoings. He also wryly suggested introducing 'creepology' as the study of those who facilitate political elites' wrongdoings (Alatas 2002: 156). Although these concepts appear somewhat comical, Alatas was serious in wanting to highlight the 'fools' and 'creeps' who constitute an undeserving and privileged class that cause social harm and injure others in a manner that makes his scholarship highly criminological. Alatas is also worthy of criminologists' attention because he focused on what is now referred to as 'crimes of the powerful', a topic which is still under-researched by criminologists and which Alatas could help draw attention to. Moreover, he was a pioneer in studying crimes of the powerful given that he was exploring such themes from the 1960s even though Frank Pearce only coined the notion of 'crimes of the powerful' in 1976. Not only was he a pioneer of studying crimes of the powerful, but his contributions could help overcome some of the limitations of the crimes of the powerful literature such as; i) it being almost entirely focused on the crimes of elites from the USA and the UK, ii) it not exploring how the victimisation of non-Western populations can be even worse than the victimisation of Western populations due to elite perceptions of their lower worth, iii) it not giving enough attention to topics like colonialism and corruption, iv) it underappreciating the way in which intellectuals and academics can commit crimes of the powerful, and v) it neglecting historic crimes of the powerful and how they continue

to have ramifications for those whose ancestors were collectively oppressed. Finally, Alatas' scholarship could be enriching for criminologists today due to the unique and original perspectives, solutions and concepts that he offered, as will be discussed below. In this regard, engaging with Alatas can help overcome 'the insularity of western criminology [which] has contributed to the stunting of the discipline [meaning] that it is in the interest of the discipline to open up to other perspectives in order to advance knowledge further' (Agozino 2010: xi). Below I will introduce four of Alatas' key works in order to achieve this.

The Problem of Corruption (2015 [1968]) was published posthumously in 2015 and is a revised version of a book Alatas first published in 1968 entitled *The Sociology of Corruption*. It remains relevant today due to it being 'a piece of invaluable literature in the study of corruption' (Ali 2017: 199). In this book, Alatas offered a thorough assessment of corruption in all its forms even though he noted that it is notoriously difficult to study due to the secrecy that surrounds it. His focus on corruption is significant because corruption is neglected in criminological research and Alatas recognised this himself when he mentioned that 'the sociology of corruption in general has received relatively little attention from social scientists' (2015 [1968]: 8). This may be because social scientists tend to 'address problems that arise in a metropolitan theoretical literature, and no other' (Connell 2006: 259), which is significant when one considers that corruption is often imagined as rare in the West even though it is a major concern in non-Western contexts. Corruption, of course, is not only confined to non-Western societies which shows how prioritising non-Western agendas may prove to be useful for exploring under-researched issues in Western contexts too. Alatas believed that the lack of attention toward corruption needed to be rectified given the gravity of it compared to other crimes: 'The relation between crime and corruption is well-documented. But more serious than the extortion racket organized by criminal syndicates is the extortion carried out by government servants' (2015 [1968]: 75).

In *The Problem of Corruption*, Alatas offered new vocabulary and detailed definitions to better understand corruption. One of the terms that he introduced is 'tidal corruption' which he metaphorically defined as 'a corruption that floods the entire state apparatus involving those at the centre of power. Like the tide, it rises to cover wider areas and immerse the surrounding vegetation' (2015 [1968]: 64). This unique conceptualisation recognises that while corruption may manifest in all societies, in some societies, it can be so excessive that it overwhelms institutions. Thus, the notion of tidal corruption captures the urgency with which corruption must be tackled which is often more relevant in non-Western contexts. Alatas detailed more subtle forms of corruption beyond the obvious financial bribery and abuse of office. For example, he explained how prize-winning, gift-giving and legitimate purchases can be manipulated for corrupt purposes. He also identified corruption as cyclical and observed how it can cause long-term social consequences like the deterioration of social relations, 'brain drain', environmental damage and poor health for citizens as a result of the stress of living in a corrupt society. While he did not believe that corruption should ever be considered as legitimate, he suggested a helpful distinction between 'victims of corruption', meaning those who are compelled to engage in corruption, and 'partners of corruption', meaning those who choose to benefit from corruption. Alatas also provided a comprehensive depiction of the multiple causes of corruption, amongst which colonialism, political negligence and an ineffective criminal justice system are noteworthy for criminologists. This demonstrates Alatas' awareness of a neglected point which is that even if elites are not directly involved in criminality such as corruption, their (in)actions may mean

that they are still liable for creating a climate that allows it to flourish (Michalowski and Kramer 2006: 9).

As well as systematically codifying corruption and explaining why it exists, Alatas presented possible solutions for addressing corruption which involved suggestions like grassroots activism, political reform, new regulatory measures, harsher punishments and effective campaigning to stigmatise corruption. Here, Alatas was early to recognise what is still being argued today, which is that existing institutions such as the criminal justice system require substantial reforms if crimes of the powerful are to be dealt with appropriately (Tombs and Whyte 2015: 4; Whyte 2009: 1). Alatas also proposed the utilisation of religious teachings about justice, honesty and decency to combat corruption. For instance, he suggested that '[t]he teachings of Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and Chinese sages are excellent sources of the anti-corruption outlook' (2015 [1968]: 94). Indeed, Alatas' Muslim faith influenced his scholarship as he sought to reconcile religion with modernity in a manner that allowed him to promote religious themes throughout his work (Maia 2014: 1104–1107). In one instance, he even proposed religion as a solution to the criminological question: 'What keeps the population stable and restrained from committing crimes and evil acts?' (Alatas 2007: 378). This favourable view of religious morality is a unique suggestion that is less likely to be found in Western scholarship given the typically irreligious tone of Western social science and the rarity of criminologists engaging with religion (Cross 2018: 265–267). Non-Western scholars like Alatas may therefore generate questions for criminologists about the importance of religion for understanding criminality, punishment and reintegration.

In Alatas' next notable book, *Thomas Stamford Raffles: Schemer or Reformer* (1971), Alatas offered a thorough assessment of the misdeeds of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. A British colonialist, Raffles is often described as having 'founded' Singapore, and is recognised to have been at the forefront of furthering British interests in Southeast Asia in the early 19th century. These 'achievements' have led Raffles to be celebrated as a 'heroic explorer' but Alatas' 'creative mind' meant that he did not take Raffles' revered status for granted. Instead, he offered evidence that suggests that Raffles engaged in serious wrongdoing. Alatas' criticism of Raffles starts with him being an enthusiastic figurehead of a ruthless imperialism that harmed Southeast Asian people, used violence against them, stole their land and exploited their resources. If that does not already sound like someone who has committed crimes against humanity, Alatas also offered more specific examples of Raffles' criminality. For instance, Alatas suggested that in 'the Banjarmasin affair', Raffles engaged in a problematic acquisition of a huge area of land in Borneo for his friend, which amounted to a toxic combination of what can only be described as corruption, abuse of office, profiteering, despotism and cronyism (1971: 34–35). Alatas suggested that Raffles was involved in a problematic collusion between political and economic elites that would today be referred to as state-corporate crime. Thus, Alatas could also be considered as a forerunner of discussing state-corporate crime since he was addressing it in the 1970s even though criminologists only begun to properly conceptualise it in the 1990s (Michalowski and Kramer 2006: 14). Alatas also accused Raffles of being involved in the forced transportation of innocent people to work on the land, which today would be considered as kidnapping, enslavement and human trafficking (1971: 36–38). After exploring historical documents about 'the massacre of Palembang', Alatas claimed that Raffles was guilty of being complicit in murder, or perhaps a war crime. This little-known incident in Indonesian history involved the killing of a number of Dutch colonialists – who were in competition with the British

in the region – even though they had already surrendered, a massacre that Alatas suggested Raffles sanctioned, encouraged and facilitated (1971: 8–11).

Alatas' objective in *Thomas Stamford Raffles* was to highlight that even celebrated elites who are remembered favourably by historians can engage in some of the worst crimes and not be held accountable. He drew attention to the fact that elite wrongdoing can go unpunished due to their power and resources in a manner that is still relevant for criminologists because it remains true today (Iadicola 2010; Kramer 2011: 446–447). Alatas offered a pertinent example of how criminologists may reveal the crimes of the powerful in order to promote justice and overcome 'the failure to criminalise crimes of the powerful' (Whyte 2009: 176). This reflects his commitment to a utopian vision of an attainable justice in which the virtuous triumph over the malevolent in a manner that means his scholarship takes on a more normative tone than is found in much criminological scholarship. Furthermore, Alatas chastised historians who offer ethnocentric and unbalanced accounts of historical figures rather than provide a more realistic assessment of their behaviour. This highlights that one's understanding of historic crimes are largely determined by dominant discourses, but also shows that these narratives can be challenged through intense scrutiny. This is important because the crimes of the powerful literature has only occasionally considered historic crimes of the powerful, usually in relation to Nazi Germany, whereas Alatas addresses European colonialism in a manner that is not often undertaken by criminologists. Furthermore, he indirectly challenges scholars to avoid abetting those who have perpetrated historic crimes of the powerful by glossing over their crimes.

Alatas continued his exploration of the wrongdoings of political elites in colonial and postcolonial settings in *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* (1977). In this book he offered another resounding critique of postcolonial elites, who, according to Alatas, are not much better than the likes of Raffles. This is significant because, as with his writings on corruption, Alatas was focusing on the injustices perpetrated by non-Western elites in a manner that is not common within the crimes of the powerful literature. For Alatas, postcolonial societies are largely governed by incompetent technocrats who are unable to offer meaningful solutions for social problems, or even to diagnose them in the first place. This is partly due to a colonial hangover that stifled native knowledge production and left them unprepared to self-govern due to an 'intellectual break' (Alatas 1977: 48–50). This helps one to appreciate how historic crimes of the powerful can continue to cause intergenerational social harm even after the initial wrongdoing ceased. Alatas' focus in *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* was less on the historical conditions that led to such a situation though, and more on the failure of the postcolonial elites to rectify colonial damage. Alatas introduced the term 'bebalisma' which is derived from the Malay word for 'stupidity' to refer to a context in which there is a normalisation of incompetence, ineffectiveness, mediocracy, ignorance, stubbornness, regression and sluggishness amongst elites (1977: 25–29). He spoke about 'bebalians' as those who facilitate bebalisma which not only shows how unique concepts can emerge from non-English languages but also resonates with his notions of 'fools' and 'captive minds' mentioned earlier. Bebalisma then is both a climate that manifests when bebalians dominant influential positions but also the environment that nurtures more bebalians. Alatas wished to dismantle this cyclical relationship between an anti-intellectual atmosphere and inadequate innovation by promoting an 'intellectual revolution' in which a scholarly environment would be promoted so as to allow a stratum of gifted thinkers to navigate society toward a better place. Alatas demonstrates that intellectuals can also be part of a powerful elite who cause harm to society which is a significant diversion from the crimes of the powerful literature which has tended to exclusively focus on political and economic elites.

Intellectuals in Developing Societies may seem to offer less criminological relevance than Alatas' other works but this is only because elite incompetence, foolishness or bebalisma are not typically defined as crimes. That is because 'crime is principally defined by the powerful in the interest of the powerful, and that those who are most likely to be defined as criminal are those who have the least power' (Iadicola 2010: 140). Alatas recognised this when he wrote: 'Since it is no crime to be a fool, we cannot, as with criminals, conduct a direct study of convicted fools' (Alatas 1977: 44). Here, even though Alatas noted that foolishness often overlaps with criminality such as corruption, he hinted at the frequent mismatch between criminalisation and wrongdoing. This could help criminologists to demonstrate that behaviour which is legal can be even more harmful than criminal behaviour. It may also lead criminologists to reconsider how the law could be used to hold elites to account for their inefficiency, wastage, mismanagement and unresolved promises. Alternatively, criminologists may shift from focusing on the *crimes* of the powerful, to a more pertinent focus on the *transgressions* of the powerful, given that elite wrongdoing may not be legally criminalised or subject to the scrutiny of law enforcers (Iadicola 2010: 123–124; Michalowski and Kramer 2006: 4–5). The criminological relevance of the arguments contained in *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* also become apparent when it is recognised that the bebalians utilise sinister methods to repress those who wish to hold them to account including the misappropriation of the criminal justice system (Alatas 1977: 71–74).

Alatas' most celebrated work is *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (2010 [1977]). Like the books mentioned previously, this work contains themes that are criminological in nature even though it has not been identified as such before. It serves as a pioneering example of a text that could rectify criminology's usual silence on colonialism as it illustrates how colonialism was a major state crime that perpetuated numerous injustices against Southeast Asian natives, the ramifications of which still reverberate today. Although Alatas was critical of Karl Marx for being Eurocentric (2010 [1977]: 232–235), the book contains a Marxist inclination which is reflected in Alatas' belief that 'colonial capitalism' underpinned the harms that were endured by the natives and in his focus on the ideological apparatus that was deployed by elite actors to further their domination and exploitation. Indeed, Alatas' reoccurring focus on elite misconduct means that this Marxist strain is present throughout all of his writings and is another parallel that Alatas has with the crimes of the powerful literature which also tends to be based on Marxist assumptions (Tombs and Whyte 2015: 3–4). More specifically, Alatas wished to deconstruct the European hegemonic narrative about the supposed laziness, ineptitude and backwardness of Southeast Asian natives which were not based on reality but instead concocted in order to justify exploitation. In this regard, he was challenging a type of institutional racism that criminologists have only been attentive to in more recent years. He achieved this by showing how the natives were misunderstood as lazy because of multiple factors including their resistance to the colonisers' demands, an ethnocentric misunderstanding of their way of life and the consequences of the Southeast Asian climate. Alatas debunked the biological racism that characterised the colonial era by documenting the historical instances in which Southeast Asian natives had succeeded and by explaining how colonialism had led to their stagnation. Using his ironic argumentation, Alatas argued that it was actually the European colonisers who were indolent as is reflected in their exploitative treatment of natives in order to satisfy their own greed. Alatas dealt with other crimes committed by colonial authorities too, such as the colonisers' aggressive manipulation of indentured labourers who were trapped in an unfortunate state of perpetual poverty and whose working conditions were deplorable. He also considered the abuse, captivity, starvation and rape they faced in a manner that ultimately

concludes that state violence and institutionalised racism were rampant in Southeast Asian colonies. Finally, Alatas also considered the colonial elites' monopoly on gambling, opium and alcohol which enabled them to generate large revenues from questionable sources whilst at the same time as ensuring the natives were dependent on them and mired in addictive vices.

In the same work, Alatas also reflected on the legacy of the colonial period in the post-colonial context, which is why he wrote: 'I believe in the need to unmask the colonial ideology, for its influence is still very strong' (Alatas 2010 [1977]: 9). In particular, he discussed how colonial ideology continued to shape the governance of former colonies after colonialism formally ended and went on to conclude that the native elites who replaced the colonial elites were similarly felonious due to their acceptance of the colonial stereotypes and continued aggressions against the native population. Alatas believed that these native elites engaged in the same type of scheming as the colonial elite by blaming the natives for their social problems as a way of masking their own complicity in creating poor social conditions because of their political misconduct. Here again, Alatas alleged that the native elite are indolent rather than the natives more generally. This offers a novel account of the transmission of institutionalised deviance from one elite to another, a theme that is not commonly discussed in crimes of the powerful literature, showing how there can be a seamless continuation of the crimes of the powerful, despite major societal transition. Thus, Alatas reveals the importance of recognising that historical injustices may underpin contemporary injustices which may lead to new perspectives about where responsibility lies for crimes of the powerful and how they should be responded to. *The Myth of the Lazy Native* has never been included within the ridged disciplinary borders of criminology. However, like with his other work, it is apparent that Alatas was concerned with pressing criminological themes, including matters relating to state crime, state-corporate crime, state violence, coercive force, labour abuse, institutional racism, political negligence, political misconduct, abuse of office and extraterritorial injustice. In this regard, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* is under appreciated in criminological circles and, like his other books mentioned above, should be a candidate for inclusion in criminological teaching and research.

Conclusion

Like other social sciences, criminology is Westerncentric to its detriment. A more inclusive approach is required so that scholarly contributions from beyond the West can be included in criminological knowledge production. This shift may already be occurring which is why optimism has been expressed: 'We are in an exciting time in criminology, as the scholarship is becoming more global, collaborative, and interdisciplinary' (Belknap 2016: 250). There are multiple ways of decolonising the social sciences but one of the most promising avenues relates to incorporating non-Western scholarship into teaching and research. In this article, I have argued that the work of Syed Hussein Alatas contains much criminological relevance, particularly in relation to the crimes of the powerful. This is not because Alatas' work is flawless or because he is perfectly suited to the contemporary era because neither of these assertions are true, but because he pioneered discussions about crimes of the powerful in a manner that generated original and astute contributions that remain relevant today. This article does not seek to promote a romanticised nativism, nor does it aim for a tokenistic inclusion, but it hopes to stimulate a genuine dialogue with the valuable scholarship of a non-Western intellectual (Connell 2006: 260). In future, criminologists may add

Syed Hussein Alatas to criminology curricula or may apply his ideas to criminological research, but at the very least, they should recognise him as a criminological pioneer.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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