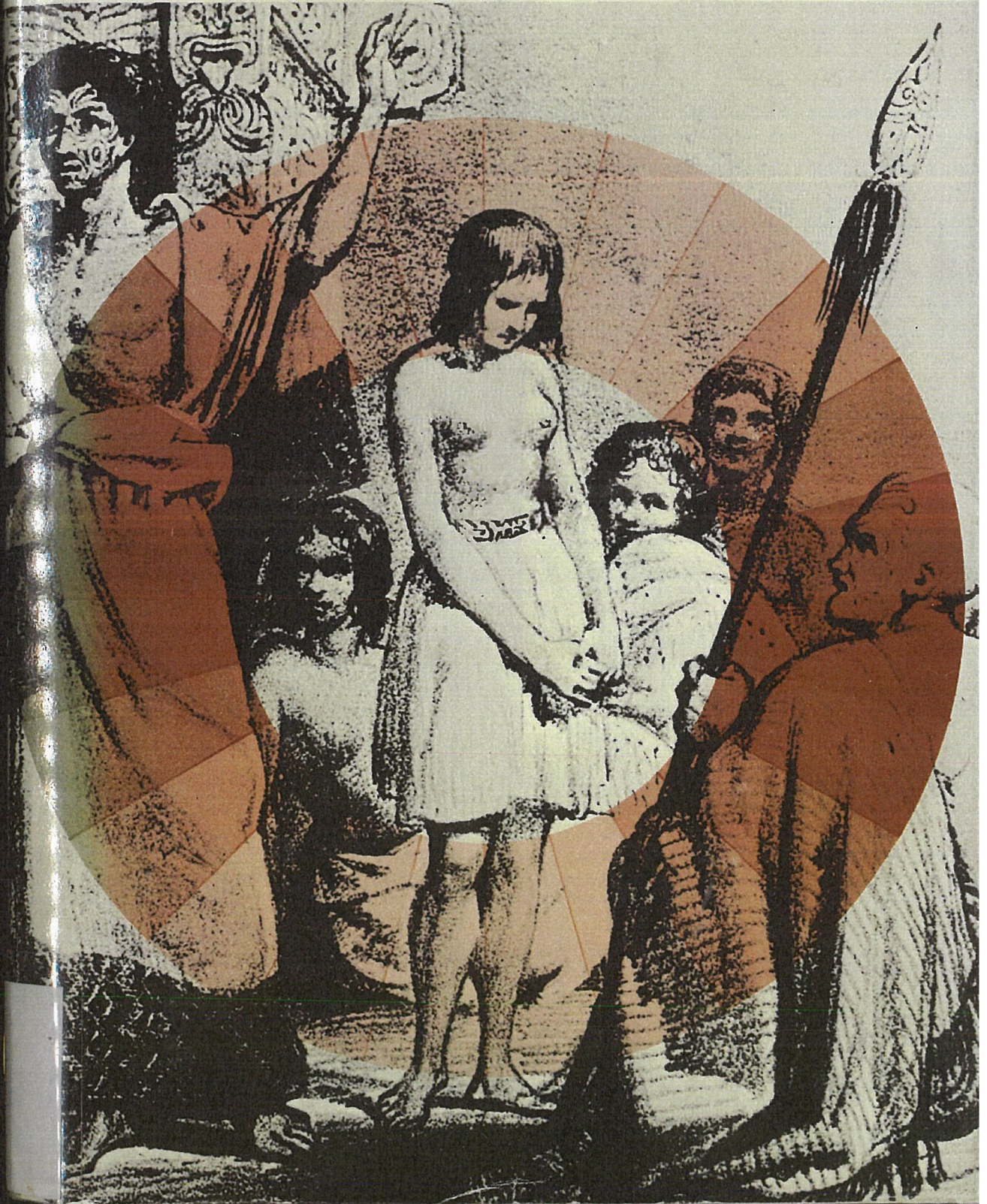


a show

(Ward, A., 1973: 271)

racial 'amalgama'
in nineteenth century
New Zealand

Alan Ward



5th

A SHOW OF JUSTICE

racial 'amalgamation' in nineteenth century
New Zealand

ALAN WARD

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Ngatiporou who were not winning elections, pressed persistently for a member of their own.³¹ Some of the more confident leaders did seek an enlargement of the Maori franchise on the common roll, but most were discouraged from this course by the fact that they were used by Pakeha candidates in elections and virtually ignored by the successful members thereafter.³² Seeing that common roll representation was being quoted to block requests for more special seats, Hoani Nahe, in 1876, asked that it be abolished.³³ Occasionally a venturesome Maori stood for a common roll seat, but these efforts were quite ineffectual, although Wi Katene did poll third out of four candidates in the Bay of Islands in 1879.³⁴

Maori members in the Assembly were generally to be found with the opposition and were vehement critics of Government Maori policies. Their efficacy is hard to gauge. In the major questions such as the Native Land Acts they had little immediate effect. But Tairaroa's persistence kept the Ngaitahu claims before public attention and this, in the long run, was to bear fruit. Maori members could also secure redress for small grievances by asking questions of Ministers.

Aggrieved Maori also sought redress by petitioning the Assembly, while the Native Affairs Committee set up after 1872 to handle the flood of petitions became an important part of New Zealand's constitutional machinery. It included the four Maori members and Opposition representatives, although the Government normally kept a majority on it and before 1879 the Maori members' votes were split as often as they were united. Here too redress could not be gained on the large questions such as return of confiscated lands but in a variety of small questions, especially if Government members were absent, petitioners were able to obtain favourable decisions.³⁵ The Committee received scores of appeals from the Land Court and although it declined to review judicial decisions, from time to time reported that it considered there were grounds for a rehearing, or urged correction of a faulty survey. It then rested entirely with the Government and the Land Court whether action was taken, but a favourable decision by the Committee (as in the case of back rents for the Princes Street reserve) especially if taken up by Opposition, could embarrass the Government or cause a well-disposed Minister to act.³⁶ The Native Affairs Committee was one institution which helped create just sufficient flexibility to prevent the Maori from quite despairing of the parliamentary system.

The Maori people's own political organisation showed great variety and vitality in the 1870s. Local councils or *runanga* were of continuing importance. *Hapu* and inter-*hapu* meetings increased in frequency and complexity, accompanied by a spate of building of elaborate and finely decorated 'meeting houses'. *Tangihanga* (burial rites) for important chiefs were widely attended and were the occasion of much social and political debate. Semi-permanent committees or