

## General editor's foreword

In this unique and original study, Sabine Hanke conducts a comparative analysis of the circus in Britain and Germany during the interwar years and the years of the Second World War. She argues that, like other forms of popular culture, the circus served as a catalyst for national identity and societal discourse, and as a focus for contemporary concerns. She traces the evolution of the circus between the wars and reflects on the challenges presented by the Depression, the progress of modernity and the influence of America on popular culture. In the widespread use of non-European performers, both human and animal, the circus contributed to the construction of 'otherness', which reinforced the dominant narrative of imperialism. The use of ethnographic groups, such as the Padaung women of Burma and the Native American Lakota tribesmen, linked ideas of gender to those of empire. She covers the hitherto little-studied role of the state, particularly Nazi Germany, in regulating the circus. She engages with the work of a wide array of other scholars to further enrich the study of the circus as a meaningful cultural vehicle. The book has been extensively researched, drawing on newspapers, magazines, diaries and programmes to evoke the colourful world of circus performance. This is a major contribution to the study of a cultural form that was an integral and formative part of the leisure of generations of spectators old and young.

*Jeffrey Richards*