ABSTRACT

MANDY HAZEL REID. In the Demise of Empire: Challenging Assumptions of Hybrid Identity in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and Meera Syal’s *Anita and Me*. (Under the direction of Professor Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi.)

Britain faced two major problems in the postwar era: a severe shortage of labor and the loss of international preeminence secondary to the decline of its Empire. Britain tried to strengthen its grip on commonwealth nations by encouraging its citizens to emigrate to the colonies while simultaneously enacting policies in the UK that were meant to discourage immigration into the UK from commonwealth subjects of color. The consequences of the UK government’s actions had far reaching effects while the movement of large numbers of people pushed disparate cultures together. Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and Meera Syal’s *Anita and Me* highlight the challenges of growing up during the decline of the British Empire and living between two cultures. Tambu, Nyasha and Meena might fit the definition of hybrid, a term defined by Homi Bhabha as existing in a space that is in between cultures or, in the “third space of annunciation.” However, Bhabha’s definition fails to recognize the inequality and hierarchy of power relations girls like Tambu must confront in order to occupy the third space. Challenging Bhabha’s theory using his image of the stairway as a liminal space, I argue that for these young women what might be defined as cultural hybridity is actually an internal conflict caused by the external competing demands of two cultures. By exploring issues of race, class, and gender that permeate these girls’ lives, and the competing cultural demands they constantly navigate, we can understand why defining these women as hybrids is reductive to our understanding of their identities. Exploring
these questions concerning also helps illustrate why issues of race and class persist in British society more than fifty years later.