

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: *"I AM VERY DARK, BUT COMELY":*
CONSCIOUSNESS AND BLACK WOMEN IN
THE FICTION OF ECUADOR'S LUZ
ARGENTINA CHIRIBOGA

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This dissertation explores the journeys of black women protagonists to self-awareness or consciousness in three novels by Afro-Ecuadorian writer Luz Argentina Chiriboga. This study analyzes the five paradigms that come together to create a level of consciousness that may be described as Chiriboga's "poetics." These paradigms of consciousness include historical consciousness, Afia-feminist consciousness, erotic consciousness, identity and empowerment.

Chiriboga's goal through her literary works is to awaken in her people, the blacks of Esmeraldas, a significant level of consciousness about their history, their culture, and their own empowerment. In her first novel, *Tambores bajo de mipiel*, the teenager Rebeca leaves her Pacific coast home for the urban city of Quito during the political unrest of the 1960s to attend high school. She experiences various sensual encounters with different men while pining for her ideal man Julio. Through these adventures, Rebeca begins to understand herself thereby achieving a level of empowerment which enables her to return home and run her family's farm.

Chiriboga's second novel *Jonatds y Manuela* is a historical novel that takes place during Ecuador's period of slavery prior to South American independence. It follows three generations of a family of women during slavery. The two title characters include Jonatas, the third generation in the family, and her mistress,

Manuela who was Simon Bolivar's lover. Both eventually assist Bolivar in the war for independence.

The last novel, *En la noche del viernes*, takes place in contemporary Ecuador and follows the journey of the protagonist Susana as she faces racism, betrayal, and a difficult marriage. Both Susana, as well as her friend Luz, overcome many obstacles to reach a high level of consciousness and eventually gain empowerment.