



# Arribada | A Reader's Guide

by Estela González

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## Glossary

Set in Mexico, *Arribada* uses a number of non-English terms. But Mexico is a multi-cultural country with sixty-eight Indigenous languages currently spoken, and *Arribada* includes two of these: Nahuatl, spoken by the Nahuas (also known as Aztecs), and Cmiique iitom, spoken by the Seri-Comcáac of northern Mexico. Additionally, Alonso's fondness of Brazilian music is expressed with some Portuguese terms. This glossary marks non-Spanish terms with the following abbreviations: C = Cmiique iitom; N = Nahuatl; P = Portuguese.

**Águas de Março (P).** “The Waters of March”; song by Antonio Carlos Jobim (1923–80)

**Alma Llanera.** “Soul of the Plains,” traditional Venezuelan song

**Aquí tiene.** Here you are

**Arréglame.** Do me up

**Arribada.** Massive sea turtle nesting event; *arribada* means “arrival” in Spanish

**Ayotlan (N).** Place of sea turtles

**Ayotlecos (N).** Ayotlan inhabitants

**Bachianas brasileiras (P).** Series of guitar compositions inspired by J. S. Bach, by Brazilian Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887–1959)

**Blanco/a.** Light-skinned person

**Bolero.** Song with a slow rhythm, traditionally from Cuba; popular in most of Latin America

**Buki.** Child; term used in northern Mexico

**Buñuelo.** Fritter

**Caguama.** Green turtle

**Calandria.** Horse-drawn carriage

**Cállate.** Shut up!

**Carcajada.** Boisterous laughter

**Careyes.** Plural for “carey,” “hawksbill sea turtle”

**Carreritas.** Races

**Casa chica.** Small home; in Mexico, this refers to an adulterous man's second household

**Castiza.** Woman of Spanish origin

**Cempasúchitl (N).** Marigold

**Chicharra.** Cicada

**Chichi (N).** Breast

**Chinga.** To fuck  
**Ciudadela.** Crafts market in Mexico City  
**Clave de Sol (G-cleff), Clavellina (flower bush, *Pseudobombax ellipticum*), Clara-bella (Clarabelle, Disney character).** Alonso's nicknames for Clavel, riffing on her name  
**Compadre.** Pal  
**Compa.** Short for *compañero*, "comrade"  
**Criada.** Servant; young person raised by a family as a servant  
**Criadero.** Breeding ground; in *Arribada*, pigsty  
**Criolla.** Woman of Spanish descent  
**Danzón.** Traditional dance rhythm from Cuba  
**Dignidad ante la adversidad.** Dignity in the face of adversity  
**Disculpe la molestia.** Excuse the trouble  
**Disminuída.** Diminished  
**Ejército.** Army  
**El Sauce y la Palma.** "The Willow and the Palm," traditional Sinaloan song  
**En este país.** In this country  
**Escuincle (N).** Little boy  
**Estanquillo.** Corner store  
**Excélsior.** Mexican national newspaper  
**Feíta.** Rather ugly  
**Gañanes.** Plural for *gañán*, "peasant"  
**Gata.** Female cat  
**Golfina.** Olive ridley sea turtle  
**Guiso.** Stew  
**Haz el bien sin ver a quién.** Do well without remarking on whom  
**Huachinango (N).** Red snapper fish  
**Huapango.** Traditional rhythm from eastern Mexico  
**Huipiles (N).** Plural for *huipil*, traditional hand-embroidered women's blouse  
**Ihapa iya ihapa (C).** It is true  
**India pura.** "Purebred" Indigenous woman  
**India.** Pejorative term referring to an Indigenous woman  
**Indita.** Little Indian girl  
**Invertido.** Pejorative expression referring to a gay person  
**Jaiba.** Crab  
**Jamoncillo.** Caramel  
**La Escobilla.** One of the few remaining *arribada* sites in the world, in Oaxaca, Mexico  
**La hora de los novios.** "The Sweethearts' Hour," radio show  
**La Mar.** The Sea  
**Laúd.** Leatherback sea turtle  
**Libre.** Free, sign on taxicabs  
**Limonaria.** Orange jasmine, *Murraya paniculata*  
**Limonero.** Lemon tree  
**Linda.** Pretty girl  
**Luego luego.** Right away  
**Luisín.** Nickname for Luisa  
**Madrina.** Godmother

**Malagradecida.** Ingrate  
**Malecón.** Seaside promenade  
**Manda.** Promise  
**Marchantas.** Merchants  
**Matita-Pereira (P).** Mythical Brazillian creature who grants wishes to whomever steals his magic hat  
**Mazunte (N).** “Please lay eggs”; name of town in Oaxaca state  
**Mestiza.** Mixed-race person  
**Mijita.** My little daughter  
**Milpa.** Corn plant  
**Mira nomás.** Check it out  
**Moosnápa (C).** Green sea turtle  
**Moosni (C).** Sea turtle  
**Moosni Cooyam (C).** Juvenile turtle  
**Moosni Otác (C).** Olive ridley sea turtle  
**Moosni Quipáacalc (C).** Hawksbill sea turtle  
**Moosnípol (C).** Leatherback sea turtle  
**Morral.** Cross-body bag, traditionally worn by Indigenous Mexicans  
**Muñeca.** Doll  
**Muzak.** Recorded light music played in shops, restaurants, or offices  
**Naca.** Mexican pejorative meaning working-class, dark-skinned, or Indigenous woman  
**Nada.** Nothing  
**Nahual (N).** Traditional companion animal  
**Nana, Nanita.** Nanny, little nanny  
**Nena.** Girl  
**Niña.** Girl  
**No es nada.** It is nothing  
**Olas altas.** High waves  
**¡Órale!** All right, then!  
**Padrino.** Godfather  
**Pájaros Island.** Isle of Birds  
**Venados Island.** Isle of Deer  
**Lobos Island.** Isle of Wolves  
**Panela.** Fresh cheese from Mexico  
**Parto.** Childbirth  
**Patrona.** Female boss  
**Pelagatos.** Pauper, ragamuffin  
**Pendeja.** Stupid woman  
**Pensión.** Guesthouse  
**Perdónala.** Forgive her  
**Pescadito.** Little fish  
**Pinche.** Lousy  
**Pito.** Informal term for “penis”  
**Placeres.** Pleasures  
**Plazuela.** Town plaza  
**Polvos de arroz.** Rice face powder  
**Pozole (N).** Mexican soup made with corn, pork, and a spicy broth

**Prieta.** Dark-skinned woman; also, black sea turtle  
**Punta Chueca.** Town inhabited by the Comcaác of northwestern Mexico  
**Puro.** Cigar  
**¡Qué mensas!** How silly!  
**¿Quién es mi madre?** Who is my mother?  
**¿Quieres?** Want some?  
**Quihubo.** How's it going?  
**Quinceañera.** Fifteen-year-old girl  
**Radionovela.** Radio soap opera  
**Ranchito.** Small ranch  
**Reina.** Queen  
**Siempre recordaré / aquellos ojos verdes.** I will always remember / those green eyes  
**¡Siéntate pues!** Sit down already!  
**Tamalitos (N).** Small tamales  
**Terrenos del mar.** Seaside lands  
**Tía, tío.** Aunt, uncle  
**Tortillera.** Tortilla maker; slang for “lesbian”  
**Tragos.** Drinks  
**Tú dime.** You tell me  
**Una casa con todo.** A house with everything  
**Valemadrismo.** Carefree attitude; from *me vale madre*, “I do not care”  
**¿Vamos?** Shall we go?  
**Viejita.** Little old lady  
**Zaguán.** Entrance hall  
**Zarandeado.** Cooking technique for roasting fish on an open fire  
**Zopilote (N).** Vulture

## Questions and Topics for Discussion

### About the Book

Mariana Sánchez Celis has traveled the world as a pianist trained at the Juilliard School of Music. But when her mother has a stroke and her beloved uncle suddenly disappears, Mariana must put her life on hold to return to her home in Ayotlan, Mexico.

She soon discovers her town is no longer the place she remembers. Ayotlan's beaches, sea turtle colonies, and historic center are decimated under decades of neglect and abuse. What part did her late father have in this? And could it be related to her uncle's disappearance?

When Fernanda Lucero, a member of the indigenous Concaác people, convinces Mariana to join her sea turtle and architectural conservation projects, the deepening love between Mariana and Fernanda threatens to put them both further in harm's way. This, together with the web of secrets Mariana unravels, stands to radically transform her and her family's fate.

*Arribada* is the story of a well-to-do woman pushed to confront her role in environmental and social injustice. It is the saga of a family faced with the realization that their comfortable position rests, beyond a strong work ethic, on crimes against what they hold dearest: the natural world, their town, and their loved ones.

## Thoughts from the Author

In *Arribada*, Ayotlan's fate affects Mariana's family, and the family affects Ayotlan's destiny.

Stand above the town—the best time is at sunset to see the steep black hills drop. Scattered among poplar, flamboyan, and palm are the houses. The hill tapers into a long peninsula, curling into a point like a dragon's tail. On its tip, as if a mischievous deity had placed a palomita firecracker, the lighthouse twinkles for the first time this evening. Look north at the dragon's underbelly—the pink dunes of Careyes Beach brighten in the sunset. See the dragon hug the bay with Venados, Pájaros, and Lobos isles—Deer, Birds, and Wolves. Now turn your eyes north to find another bay. At its end you will see another, and another. Strain a bit, and you might see more. This garland of shining bays extends longer than your eyes can see.

Here, five centuries ago, Spanish invaders built a hamlet, then a parish and a port. After Mexico's independence, citizens built the lighthouse, the Moorish tiled cathedral, its neoclassic mansions, cobblestone streets, and promenade by the sea. British, French, and American pirates raided the city occasionally, hiding their spoils in the Devil's Cave. In the twentieth century, a number of family hotels provided recreation for locals and foreigners.

The fictional town of Ayotlan is inspired in Mexican coastal towns like Mazatlán and La Paz, whose natural harbors helped turn them into commercial hubs during the 1800s. Locals fished for pearls, sailfish, marlin, turtles; entrepreneurs established shipping lines to Acapulco and Veracruz, and from there to Asia, North and South America, and Europe. After World War II, North American tourists and immigrants came to enjoy their natural beauty and joyful way of life. Many stayed.

Mariana grew up here in a middle-class family during the 1970s. She enjoyed a sheltered life and Ayotlan's rich culture and natural beauty. But when she left to study in the United States, many things were about to change.

The many foreigners brought gentrification and touristic development. New, larger hotels were built on the dunes and not behind them, dooming them to disappear. The town planned little for sewage treatment or trash management. To please customers, builders replaced traditional architecture with modern hotels, restaurants, and entertainment. Little regard for the height of buildings, culturally authentic colors, or materials altered the town's visual aspect and undermined its identity. In the historic center, many families sold their homes during the 1980s and moved to the new neighborhoods north of town.

The “furnace-free industry,” as tourism is called by the Mexican government, was meant to create jobs. But the survival salaries failed to integrate waiters, groundskeepers, or maids into the economy they supported. Traditional occupations like fishing suffered too. For centuries, sea turtles had fed humans, birds, and fish. As hunting industrialized in the 1960s, tortoiseshell and leather turned into combs, eyeglasses, boots, or wallets. But turtles are a keystone species—they maintain sea grasses and coral reefs, keep jellyfish and sponges in check, bring nutrients from the sea to the land. This awareness created a movement that led to the international hunting ban of 1990. It also took a source of income from the working class.

Then there is the drug trade. After World War II, the lands surrounding Mazatlán supplied the legal painkiller market in the United States. After the Vietnam War, a greatly increased demand in the United States for illegal drugs, an unchecked influx of weap-

ons from the United States, and a deficient Mexican judiciary created a perfect storm for organized crime. The U.S. War on Drugs that began in the 1970s, and its Mexican version in the 2000s, exacerbated the problem. Mazatlán has seen an ebb and flow of this violence, experiencing a truce in the past decade, since the arrest of several heads of the Sinaloa cartel.

These are some of the forces facing Ayotlan as Mariana is called back home in 1989.

## Discussion Questions

1. It is often said that once you leave home, you can never return, and home will never be the same again. Have you ever returned to a beloved childhood place you stopped frequenting for a long time? How was it changed, and what was your reaction in discovering those changes?
2. Identify a few beloved aspects of Mariana's hometown. What do they mean to her emotionally?
3. Many of the emotions in this novel are expressed through music. Did you recognize some songs or pieces mentioned in the narrative? Did knowing or discovering the music help you resonate emotionally with the characters' experiences? In which ways?
4. What are some aspects of Fernanda's work with sea turtles that stand out to you?
5. Describe Clavel's attitude toward Fernanda. Can you explain what motivates her?
6. Now describe Fernanda's situation in the community where she lives. Which of her coping strategies do you notice, and what effect do they have on her and others?
7. In the second part of the novel, Clavel makes some extraordinary decisions that affect the lives of Mariana and Amalia. What does she do, and how does she explain it?
8. Describe the choices Alonso makes vis-à-vis his career. What motivates him, and what are the consequences of these choices?
9. In the end, Mariana makes several decisions that affect her family's wealth and well-being. Can you explain them from her point of view? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?
10. At the end of the story, how has this family been transformed, and what is its outlook going forward? Reflect about a character of your choice. What are the character's chances to find fulfillment, and why?

## About the Author

Estela González holds an MFA in creative writing and a PhD in Latin American literature. As a binational and bilingual writer, she tells stories in English and Spanish about race, class, gender, and environmental justice. Growing up in Mexico, Estela regularly visited her family in Mazatlán, where decades-long intensive development has led to the demise of



beaches and sea turtle colonies. Her research and support of fishermen protecting sea turtles in the Sea of Cortés deepen her reflections on environmental justice, race relations, and sexuality.

Her work is featured in the *Barcelona Review*, the *Cobalt Review*, *Connotation Press*, *Cronopio*, *Flash Frontier*, *Flyway Magazine*, *Kudzu House*, *Label Me Latina*, *La Colmena*, *Luvina*, the *Fem*, and the *Revista Mexicana de Literatura Contemporánea*, as well as in outstanding collections such as *Best of Solstice Literary Magazine*, *Feminine Rising* (Cynren Press, 2019), and *Under the Volcano*. *Arribada* was a 2019 finalist for Feminist Press's Louise Meriwether Award.

## Get in Touch

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