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### The Case of the RAAN-Autonomy and Indigenous Territorial Rights By Sara Howard

This study focuses on the situation of indigenous land rights in the RAAN, beginning with a brief historical background to the present situation of indigenous and Creole land rights. Following the essay of Charles Hale ((1992), *Wani* no.12) who examines concepts of Miskito territorial rights and their role in the armed conflict for a community in the RAAS, the study explores similar themes in three Miskito communities of the RAAN.

It goes on to present some of the difficulties which arise in trying to define and title the communal lands, with examples of conflicts over territorial rights from the three communities studied. Finally, it analyses the weaknesses of the Autonomy Statute, in terms of the definition of territorial rights and the jurisdiction over natural resources, and concludes that it is necessary to modify it in order to grant to the autonomous regions wider powers over their economic bases.

### Submerged Marine Plants along Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast by Joe Ryan

The following article attempts to provide a brief explanation of the physical, chemical and ecological role of seagrasses and algae in Nicaraguan Caribbean environments.

Marine plants on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua cover the huge Nicaraguan continental shelf. It is no accident that the massive marine savannahs

of algae and seagrass thrive above the flat, otherwise featureless shelf. The clear blue water and shallow depths (average depth is only 30 meters), create ideal conditions for submarine photosynthesis that is powered by intense tropical sunlight that drives all plant life on earth.

Marine plant communities can be found across the Nicaraguan shelf from the Miskito, Pearl, Kings and Man O' War Cays to the offshore Corn Islands. Although there have been few scientific studies of the Nicaragua's Caribbean flora, at least 106 species of marine algae have been identified (see Appendix A). Greatest diversity is found among the red algae (47 species), followed by green algae (37 species), and finally brown algae (22 species). Six marine grasses, all common throughout the Caribbean, have been identified. These include turtle grass (*Thalassia testudinum*, given its name because the green turtle feeds on it), Manatee grass (*Syringodium filiforme*), Cuban shoal grass (*Halodule wrightii*) and

*Halophila*  
(*Halophila*)

*engelmani*, *H. decipiens*, and *H. johnsonii*). Successional stages appear to be *Halodule* - *Syringodium* - *Thalassia* (Phillips *et al.* 1982; Ryan 1992 a and b.).

Seagrass meadows across the shelf are thriving, especially in the huge Miskito Cays Reserve. However, in other areas such as the nearshore Pearl Cays, these grasses are badly stressed due to heavy erosion and sedimentation caused by deforestation on the mainland.

### Nicaraguan Frontiers in the XVIII Century By Germán Romero

This historical document is a letter written by the Bishop of Leon, Don Félix de Villegas, to the president of the Audiencia de Guatemala, in 1790. It allows us to get an insight into the life of the populations non subjects to the Spanish regime living a long and beyond the "frontier" of the mountainous part of Managua in the eighteenth century.

### Myth and Oral Tradition among the Sumus of the Bambana River. By Mario Rizo

It has been traditionally assumed that the sumus are members of the Misumalpan linguist family and, in cultural terms, are related to the macrochibchan stock. Besides that it has also been assumed that the sumus were groups of forest people, nomadic, pre-agricultural, lacking order and religion, who by the evangelizing action of the european churches came to know the advantages of civilization.

The essay that we present unveils this myth-through myth-by assuming that myth and oral tradition are useful instruments for ethno-historical knowledge. Sumus, the people of *mayagna*, people of the sun, are seen here, in a diachronic perspective, as having experienced a



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what Kirchhoff called Mesoamerica, from which he excluded sumus and miskitus.

God-heros, characters, rites, weltanschauung, world origins, maize agriculture, are elements found in the sumu mythology and in their practices that allow us to ascertain, if not their mesoamerican origin, at least a close contact with mayas and aztecs. Behind the sukias we find Quetzalcoalt.

It is necessary to revise the traditional conceptions about mesoamerica and the origins of the cultures of the Atlántico-Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua

### The Present Situation of the Sumus in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN).

*By Dennis Williamson*

This article is a partial survey of various socioeconomic features of the Sumu indians in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region. The overview is prepared on the basis of data collected in fieldwork conducted in late August 1992; and it is intended to provide insights on population, education, on-going projects, and other topics.

Of all socioeconomic indicators, education has the most favorable outlook. On the contrary, health conditions remain distressing, thereby most Sumu communities are vulnerable to the cholera epidemic that is spreading throughout Nicaragua.

From another standpoint, the present conditions is of economic stagnation,

characterized by a decline in traditional activities that is partially countervailed by an increase in small-scale mining and timber, and a reemergence of off-community salaried employment.

In the final analysis it seems that most sumu believe that the solution to their problem is not withdrawing from the national society, but asserting their rights in all available channels. The struggle for a secure tenure of communal lands tops the list of claims

### Linguistic Skills and Social Change: The Sumus

*By Susan Norwood*

Originally written in 1988, and slightly edited to render it compatible with the changes occurred since then, this essay discusses the historical and social processes which have made the Sumu language what it is today and describes how the social and political changes introduced by the Sandinista Revolution created the conditions for this language to make rapid social advances. It also examines the role linguists can play this later process and the space that should be given to certain kinds of linguistic knowledge in the training of language professionals on the Atlantic Coast.

