

# The Chishinga and Ushi Ecological Kinship: Revisiting *Mukowa* and *Mushi* Concepts in Earth and Human Interactions

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## ABSTRACT

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The growing ecological disaster and its effects on all life demands proactive global and local responses. The article argues that traditional beliefs can inform and direct human responses to the ongoing crisis. From this frame, the article explores the Zambian Chishinga and Ushi people's *mukowa* (generally translated as clan, but termed ecological kinship), and *mushi* (human community implanted in nature) as potential paradigms of ecological sustainability, responsibility and actions. To do this, the article situates the ecological crisis in the complex African lifeworld, plants human identity in the universe, and explores *umukowa* as it relates to *mushi*, to contend that these traditional concepts can inform constructive responses to the ecological crisis. It closes with a discussion on how *mukowa* and *mushi* can inform and positively captivate attitudes toward the natural world.

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## Introduction

In March 2019, cyclone Idai ravaged Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia—killing masses, destroying fields, bridges, homes, and displacing masses. According to the World Food Program, Ida affected “at least 3 million people”.<sup>1</sup> Since Idai came during the farming season, masses will starve unless sufficient food aid is provided through the 2021 harvest season. Even then, we cannot be certain since the “Indian Ocean is cranking out more activity than normal for the 2018-19 cyclone season”.<sup>2</sup> While the effects of such disasters are long lasting, Idai was soon overshadowed by floods and mudslides in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa that killed over 70 people in April 2019. The same month, Cyclone

1. “Cyclone Idai: 3 million in urgent need”, <<https://support.wfpusa.org/site/Donation2>>. [Accessed 24 March 2019].
2. Tropical cyclone with ‘rapid intensification’ to slam Africa, bringing 120 mph winds and downpours. <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2019/03/12/tropical-cyclone-with-rapid-intensification-slam-africa-bringing-mph-winds-downpours/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.8670e9f99233](https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2019/03/12/tropical-cyclone-with-rapid-intensification-slam-africa-bringing-mph-winds-downpours/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.8670e9f99233)>. [Accessed 16 March 2019].

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