Reply to Rocha: a note on erroneous ethnolinguistic affiliations in genetic studies of southern Africa

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I am grateful to Jorge Rocha for his comments on my paper of last year (Mitchell, 2010) regarding the importance of being clear and explicit when describing the ethnolinguistic and geographical affiliations of populations in southern Africa – or elsewhere – sampled for genetic studies. Rocha’s comments are most useful in clarifying the procedures followed by him and his colleagues (Coelho et al., 2009). At the same time, they underline the necessity of engaging in the kind of ‘housecleaning’ operation to which I hope my original paper made a contribution, for it is precisely the errors of nomenclature and origin that they unwittingly perpetuated by drawing on the mistakes first made by Pritchard et al. (1999) that need to be identified and set right. Unless this is done then recording sample provenances as described by earlier authors is bound to impact negatively on the conclusions reached by subsequent analyses. Genetic research has much to contribute to understanding southern African prehistory as Coelho et al.’s (2009) results regarding Khoe-San contributions to the gene pools of (western Bantu) Herero speakers in southwestern Angola and Nambia make clear. Greater accuracy about precisely whose genes have been sampled, coupled with greater collaboration and exchange of information between archaeologists and geneticists, can only help enhance that contribution.

References
