

*International Review of Psychoanalysis of Couple and Family*

**Nº 6-2009/2 – Link**

## **PICHON RIVIERE AND THE LINK THEORY**

*ROBERTO LOSSO\**

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud says: "from the very first individual psychology(...) is at the same time social psychology." Pichon Rivière developed this thought in the 50's with the concept of **link** (vínculo). He said, "psychology does not exist outside the link with the others". He highlighted the importance of interviewing patients in their families and social contexts. He began trends that have centered in the intersubjectivity lately.

Pichon Rivière defined *link* as "a complex structure that includes subject, object and their mutual interaction through communication and learning." The individual is built inside a *triadic link structure*, which Pichon defined as *bicorporal and tripersonal*. Although the relationship between mother and baby seems dyadic, the third functions from the very beginning, at least in the mother's mind.

*The motivational fundamentals of links* include love, contact, protection, heat, nutrition -- all related to the initial helplessness of the individual who is not viable without others.

The subject is born from links and is chained to links<sup>13</sup> and is tied to a double chain: to the generations and to contemporaries. Pichon expressed this idea through his metaphor of the cross. The individual lives in a cross: the vertical branch corresponds links with previous generations (transgenerational chain) and the horizontal one corresponds to the links with his contemporaries, firstly with family.

---

\* Psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, Training Member APA and IPA, Professor of Psychiatry, University of Buenos Aires, Director, Specialization in Psychoanalytic Approach to Families and Couples, Argentine Psychoanalytic Association and CAECE University. Secretary of International Relations, International Association of Family and Couple Psychoanalysis.

<sup>13</sup> Foulkes described the weave of human links as a net or *plexus*, whose knots represent the subjects. Therefore, if the net is undone, the knots -in other words the subjects- disappear as well

## **Link and internal group**

In every link structure, subject and object interact in a dialectic relationship. Through interaction, the link structure is internalized, acquiring, thus, an intrasubjective dimension. What was interpsychic becomes intrapsychic.

Intrasubjective relations, or internalised link structures, articulate in an internal world to integrate what Pichon Rivière has called the *internal group*, which represents the inside “stage” where reconstruction of external reality is attempted, modified by individual needs from intersubjectivity to intrasubjectivity, in transition from *sociodynamics* to *psychosocial dynamics*. The internal group is constituted from internalization of external links (at the beginning, basically the family links), distorted by individual needs. The life of subjects takes place in this continuous dialectic between the external and the internal links, or internal and external groups.

Pichon makes uses the metaphor of the *internal field* for the internal group. His concept of ***ecologic internalization***, represents internalization of the person’s life environment, highlighting the importance of social environment in the constitution and support of identity – for instance the person’s hometown. Intrasubjective relations or internalized link structures articulated in the internal group will influence the ***learning of reality***, which will be facilitated or hindered depending on whether the confrontation between the intersubjective and the intrasubjective is a ***dialectic or dilemma***.

## **The instincts (or pulsions) theory**

Valuing Fairbairn’s ideas, Pichon gave Klein’s instinct theory an intersubjective dimension. Instead of instincts, he proposed two models: a *good link*, coming from gratifying experiences and a *bad link*, coming from frustrating experiences. Gratifying experiences are ones that give the subject the life drive. We cannot help evoking certain Winnicottina ideas, like the idea that the mother must seduce her child to be willing to live. Therefore, when Pichon defined life instinct as a gratifying link and death instinct as a frustrating link, he said *drives originate in intersubjectivity*.

He proposed a ***psychiatry of the links***, where pathology was not of isolated individuals but of their links. Here, *the spokesperson* is the one considered “ill” for expressing suffering and group insecurity. Thus, family group psychotherapy is indispensable.

From Fairbairn and Lagache, Pichon Rivière understood pathological patterns as the result of distribution of the links in the three phenomenological areas: the mind, the body and the external world, that is through psychological illnesses, body symptoms or ways of behaving in society. The three areas coexist, cooperate and



interact, although one may predominate. History constitutes the subject within the link structure where he/she is the subject of desire. The individual cannot be separated from being born into a social environment, a certain society and with his/her body's demands. Pichon describes the mixed game of necessity and satisfaction, which is intrinsic to development of social relations.

I will finish by quoting Pichon: "*The human individual is a being made up of necessities which are only socially satisfied in relations which determine him/her. The subject is not only a related subject, but also a produced subject. Everything is the result of sinteraction between individuals, groups and classes*".

## **References**

Bion W., (1959), *Experiences in groups*, London Tavistock Publications.

Losso R., (2001), *Psicoanálisis de la familia*, Buenos Aires, Lumen.

Losso R., (2002), Vigencia de Enrique Pichon Riviere, *Rev. de Psicoanálisis*, 54,4, pp.883-889.

Pichon Rivière E., (1961-63), Lessons at the "Primera Escuela Privada de Psiquiatría Dinámica". Buenos Aires.

Pichon Rivière E., (1971), *Del Psicoanálisis a la Psicología Social* (2 vols.) Buenos Aires, Galerna.

Pichon Rivière E., (1975), Entrevista con Pichon Riviere acerca de Jacques Lacan. *Actualidad Psicológica*, año 1, num 12.

Pichon Rivière E., (1979), *Teoría del vínculo*. Buenos Aires, Nueva Visión.

Pichon Rivière E., (1980), "Una teoría de abordaje de la prevención en el grupo familiar". *Rev. Arg. de Medicina Psicosomática*, n. 17.