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**Call for Papers**

**The Football World Cup in the Global Imaginary: Tensions, Narratives,  
and Discourses**

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The Football World Cup is one of the most influential cultural events worldwide. Beyond its sporting dimension, the tournament can be understood as a global symbolic *dispositif* in which narratives of nation, identity, power, economy, and belonging are articulated. As such, the World Cup functions as a privileged site for observing tensions between the local and the global, between official discourses and counter-narratives, and between promises of unity and persistent inequalities.

The 2026 World Cup, hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico, offers multiple avenues for interdisciplinary engagement with the dynamics between Mexico in the world and the world in Mexico. It allows for the delineation of different football cultures from a trans- and intercultural perspective among the three host countries and their international visitors, as well as for the examination of sociodemographic differences that become visible in everyday football practices in contrast to mega-events and FIFA's increasingly megalomaniacal vision – embodied by its president Gianni Infantino – which is becoming progressively less accessible (with ticket prices ranging from 120 to 265 US dollars for the cheapest seats). Fan criticism was so strong that FIFA was forced to introduce the “Supporter Entry Tier” category at 60 dollars, despite allegedly receiving more than 500 million ticket requests for World Cup matches.

These dynamics are also evident in terms of violence and power, which are not limited to fans with the financial means to participate – recalling the failed attempt at an organizational “rehearsal” for the World Cup during the 2024 Copa América final in Miami – but also extend to the current political situation among North American countries. The Prime Minister of Canada has spoken of a “rupture in the world order, the end of a pleasant fiction” in his address at the 2026 World Economic Forum in Davos. The United States is facing a wave of internal

violence linked to migration policy and its enforcement agencies (ICE), while its president is simultaneously awarded the “FIFA Peace Prize”. In Mexico, the situation has changed little since the launch of this journal with its inaugural issue “Violence(s) in Mexico” in 2011, frequently sporting news reports like “11 deaths after a football match in Salamanca, Guanajuato,” following President Claudia Sheinbaum’s recent announcement of a 37% reduction in the daily average of homicides (from 86.9 to 54.7). How will these conflicts and dynamics be staged in the presence of visitors from around the world and under the gaze of global television cameras? How will this idea of “America” be (re-)invented within the framework of the World Cup as a supposed festival of transcultural fraternalism?

Regarding media representations, a transmedial yet polyphonic strategy can be observed. An example of the official strategy is the collaboration between FIFA and Netflix Games in the creation of the video game FIFA World Cup 2026 (iOS, Android), which appears less as a football simulation than as a marketing campaign designed to connect different audiences across multiple media formats (see the rupture between FIFA and the sports games publisher *EA Sports*).

This polyphony is equally evident in the variety of (un)official voices that shape the media environment of the event. On the one hand, there is the song “Desire” by Robbie Williams and Laura Pausini as FIFA’s official World Cup anthem. On the other, the voices of Carlos Vives, Wisin, Emilia, and Xavi come together in “Somos más,” the official anthem of Telemundo’s Spanish-language coverage. To this official media landscape are added countless pseudo-official anthems on platforms such as YouTube, which – sometimes with even higher view counts – attempt to fill a perceived media void through platform-based technologies and popular actors: AI-generated songs or tracks created by streamers such as IShowSpeed (World Cup 2022).

Beyond contemporary approaches, the World Cup in Mexico also invites a diachronic and historical perspective. From pre-Columbian ball games to the present, Mexico has been a playing field for the narrative and historical production of football in chronicles and storytelling, particularly regarding the previous editions of 1970 and 1986. It hosted legendary matches and historic moments such as the “Hand of God,” yet it also seems to have faded from the memory of the “Golden Boy” himself, who humorously commented on the selection of host venues for the 2026 World Cup as follows: “[...] Mexico doesn’t deserve it. They win two matches, then Mexicans end up facing Brazil or Germany, like it happened to me. Boom, out, Aeroméxico.” (Maradona 2016, *De la mano del 10*).

Against this backdrop, this Call for Papers proposes to analyze the Football World Cup as a global and localized imaginary, understood as a dynamic ensemble of representations, narratives, and practices circulating through media, institutions, bodies, and territories. We invite contributions that critically examine the discourses, narratives, and conflicts that emerge around the World Cup, as well as their cultural, social, political, and symbolic effects.

This call is addressed to scholars from a wide range of disciplines, including cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, history, communication and media studies, urban studies, gender studies, and related fields. Interdisciplinary, comparative, and critical approaches are particularly welcome. Contributions may focus on past editions of the World Cup, on the 2026 tournament, or on transversal analyses within the framework of the following topics:

### **Topics**

- The Football World Cup as a global imaginary and a transnational ritual
- Narratives of nation, identity, belonging, and otherness
- Geopolitical tensions, sports diplomacy, and violence
- Media, discourses, and representations (press, social media, digital culture)
- Urban transformations, cultural heritage, and mega-events
- Gender, the body, and dynamics of inclusion/exclusion
- Migration, diasporas, and football-related transnationalism
- Resistance, counter-narratives, and alternative cultural expressions

### **Formal Requirements**

- Articles and abstracts may be submitted in English or Spanish.
- **Abstract** (max. 300 words) should include a short bibliography and bio-bibliographic information (affiliation, main research areas, recent publications).
- **Articles** should be 12–15 pages (approx. 5,000–7,000 words).

### **Deadlines**

- Abstract submission: 31.03.26
- Notification of acceptance: 15.04.26
- Full article submission: 30.08.26

The articles will be published by December 2026. Submissions should be sent as Microsoft Word documents (docx) to the editors:

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