

Preserving an Afro-Brazilian Tradition in a Globalized World: The Anthropology of Capoeira



Capoeira, Mobility, and Tourism: Preserving an Afro-Brazilian Tradition in a Globalized World (The Anthropology of Tourism: Heritage, Mobility, and Society) by Andrew Joseph Keith

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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Capoeira, a unique Afro-Brazilian martial art and dance, has captivated audiences worldwide. Originating in the slave communities of Brazil, capoeira combines elements of fighting, acrobatics, and music, forming a vibrant expression of African culture and resistance. As capoeira has gained global popularity, it faces new challenges and opportunities in preserving its cultural heritage in a globalized world.

The Origins and Cultural Significance of Capoeira

Capoeira emerged during the transatlantic slave trade, when enslaved Africans in Brazil were forbidden from practicing their traditional martial arts. They disguised capoeira as a harmless game or dance, while secretly developing it into an effective self-defense system. Over the centuries, capoeira evolved into a complex cultural art form, incorporating elements of Bantu, Yoruba, and other African traditions.

Capoeira is not merely a martial art; it is a profound cultural expression that encompasses music, dance, and spiritual beliefs. The rhythmic beats of berimbau drums and the acrobatic movements of capoeira dancers embody the resilience and creativity of the African diaspora.

Challenges of Cultural Preservation in Globalization

The globalization of capoeira has brought both benefits and challenges to its preservation. On one hand, it has increased awareness and appreciation of Afro-Brazilian culture. Capoeira schools and academies have sprung up in countries around the world, promoting its physical and cultural benefits.

However, globalization also poses risks to the authenticity and integrity of capoeira. As capoeira is adapted to new audiences and contexts, there is a risk of its cultural meaning being diluted or commodified. Furthermore, the commercialization of capoeira can lead to its exploitation, with some practitioners prioritizing financial gain over cultural preservation.

Strategies for Preserving Capoeira's Cultural Heritage

To safeguard the cultural heritage of capoeira, various strategies are being implemented:

- **Establishing Traditional Schools and Academies:** Many capoeira masters have established traditional schools, known as academias, that emphasize the historical and cultural aspects of capoeira. These academies strive to preserve the original techniques, rhythms, and principles of the art form.
- **Documenting and Sharing Knowledge:** Anthropologists and researchers have documented the history, rituals, and techniques of capoeira. This knowledge is disseminated through books, articles, and online resources, ensuring that the cultural knowledge of capoeira is passed down to future generations.
- **Promoting Cultural Exchange:** Afro-Brazilian cultural organizations and capoeira schools are promoting cultural exchange programs between Brazil and other countries. These programs provide opportunities for capoeira practitioners to connect with their cultural roots and share knowledge and experiences.
- **Advocating for Cultural Recognition:** Capoeira advocates are working towards achieving official recognition of capoeira as an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO. This recognition would raise

awareness and provide protection for capoeira, ensuring its continued preservation and transmission.

Preserving the cultural heritage of capoeira in a globalized world is a complex challenge that requires collaboration and commitment from practitioners, researchers, and cultural organizations. By implementing strategies that emphasize authenticity, knowledge sharing, cultural exchange, and advocacy, we can ensure that this vibrant Afro-Brazilian tradition continues to flourish and inspire future generations.

Capoeira is not just a martial art or dance; it is a symbol of resilience, cultural diversity, and the transformative power of human expression. As we embrace the complexities of globalization, let us work together to preserve the cultural heritage of capoeira, ensuring that its spirit and traditions continue to enrich our lives.



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