Ritual Temporality and Kinship Recognition: Marriage Rituals in Oman as a Rite of Passage

Hajer Harrathi[1], Nawal Al Sheerawi[2]

[1] Faculty of Education & Art, Sohar University, Sohar, Oman.

[2] Faculty of Education & Art, Sohar University, Sohar, Oman.

[1]hharrathi@su.edu.om , [2]Nsheerawi@su.edu.om

[1]https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8524-0131, [2] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9079-7636

Corresponding Author*: Hajer Harrathi

HOW TO CITE:
Hajer Harrathi, Nawal Al Sheerawi (2026). Ritual Temporality and Kinship Recognition: Marriage Rituals in Oman as a Rite of Passage. International Journal of Special Education, 41(7s), 01-12.

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT:
Copyright: © 2026 Authors. Open access publication underthe terms and conditions of the Creative CommonsAttribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

ABSTRACT:
This anthropological field study examines marriage rituals in Omani society as an organized social rite of passage managed through a graduated ritual temporality, through which kinship structures are reproduced and the transition from singleness to marital status is regulated. The study is based on intensive ethnographic fieldwork conducted during 2024–2025 in the North Al Batinah Governorate, drawing on the researchers' prolonged immersion in the local community and on oral narratives collected from women and men across different generations. These narratives provide an emic understanding of the logic of ritual practice as it is locally experienced and interpreted. The study is theoretically grounded in Arnold van Gennep's model of rites of passage, with reference to Victor Turner's elaborations on the liminal phase. Rather than approaching marriage rituals as a festive sequence or a chronological narration of events, the study conceptualizes them as an integrated ritual structure organized around three interrelated stages: separation, liminal suspension, and reintegration. The findings demonstrate that practices such as engagement and initial preparations perform a function of symbolic separation from the world of singleness, while the liminal phase constitutes a temporal–social space in which the previous status is suspended and kinship identity is reconfigured. Wedding rituals and subsequent practices contribute to stabilizing the new social position and to the collective re-recognition of marriage. The study further reveals that contemporary organizational and economic transformations have not led to a dismantling of the logic of passage, but rather to its re-embedding within new organizational forms, while preserving the kinship function of ritual. The study concludes that marriage rituals in Oman are governed by a ritual temporality that accomplishes kinship recognition as a necessary condition for the completion of social transition, thereby ensuring the continuity of the social order despite changing modes of practice.

Keywords: Marriage rituals; rite of passage; ritual time; liminality; kinship recognition

1. Introduction: This study forms part of an ethnographic research endeavor aimed at collecting and documenting marriage rituals in Omani society as an integrated ritual system managed as a rite of passage that regulates the transition from singleness to marriage and reorganizes relationships within

kinship structures. In the Omani context, marriage is not reduced to a celebratory occasion; rather, it represents a central transitional moment governed through a sequence of successive rituals that ensure the continuity of the social order and consolidate individuals' new positions within the kinship network.

The study is not limited to documenting marriage rituals as they are practiced in the present—"as a set of rules through which collective practices are organized" [1]—but also reconstructs what may be described as the "ritual past" through in-depth interviews with elderly women and men who retain detailed memories of traditional weddings, their temporal organization, and their procedural sequencing prior to modern transformations. This dimension is methodologically significant, as oral memory is employed as an entry point for understanding the logic through which rites of passage are managed and for tracing patterns of continuity and change in the ritual structure of the marriage process as it is lived and recalled within collective memory.

The researchers' prolonged immersion in the North Al Batinah region, accompanied by daily interaction and the development of extended social relationships, enabled access to the ritual field from within. This facilitated close observation of how rituals are distributed across time, how roles are organized, and how transitions are regulated through successive stages. This approach aligns with the emphasis of contemporary anthropology on the importance of thick description, as articulated by Clifford Geertz [2], as a methodological tool for understanding social events in their broader context and for linking ritual practice to its organizational functions within the group.

Marriage rituals in Arab societies have received considerable attention in anthropological and sociological scholarship, where they have been examined as a key domain for the production of kinship and the organization of family relations. This is evident in the work of Suad Joseph, which highlights the role of family rituals in reproducing values and norms within kinship networks [3], as well as in the studies of Marcia Inhorn, which demonstrate the centrality of marriage in structuring social life in Arab contexts [4,5]. However, the application of these approaches to the Omani context has remained limited. Most existing studies have focused on heritage-oriented descriptions or sociological observations of celebratory practices and their modern transformations, without approaching marriage as an integrated rite of passage characterized by a ritual-temporal structure and clearly defined transitional functions.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to address this gap through an anthropological field-based approach that reinterprets marriage rituals in Oman as a dynamic ritual structure managed through a graduated ritual temporality, through which kinship is reproduced and social recognition of transition is regulated. The study draws on Arnold van Gennep's model of rites of passage as its central analytical framework [6], while also engaging with subsequent developments in symbolic anthropology to elucidate how ritual operates in the management of social transformation.

The research problem arises from the need to approach marriage rituals in Omani society as an organized rite of passage with a clear ritual structure, managed through a sequence of practices that regulate the transition from singleness to marriage and reorganize kinship relations. Despite the central role of marriage in Omani social life, most studies of weddings have focused on heritage documentation or sociological descriptions of celebratory forms and their contemporary transformations, without analyzing marriage as an integrated process of passage with specific stages and transitional functions. A review of the literature reveals that the ritual structure of the marriage process, the sequencing of its stages, and the function of each stage in managing transition have not yet been subjected to systematic anthropological field analysis grounded in the rites of passage model.

Accordingly, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining marriage rituals in Oman as a dynamic ritual–temporal structure that organizes transition and ensures the continuity of kinship relations. The central research question guiding the study is:

How are marriage rituals in Omani society managed as an organized rite of passage, and what ritual structure governs the stages of transition in the reproduction of kinship relations?

This main question is further articulated through the following sub-questions:

1. How are Omani marriage rituals distributed across the three stages of passage (separation, liminality, and reintegration) according to van Gennep's model?

2. What is the function of temporal organization and ritual sequencing in the Omani marriage process, and how do they contribute to regulating transition and reintegrating the bride into a new, collectively recognized kinship position?

3. What are the manifestations of continuity and change in the ritual structure of the Omani marriage process in light of contemporary social transformations?

The study aims to provide an anthropological field-based analysis of marriage rituals in Omani society as an organized social rite of passage whose stages are governed by a precise ritual structure through which the kinship system is reproduced. It seeks to analyze this process by tracing its core stages—separation, liminality, and reintegration—based on van Gennep's model, and by elucidating the social function of ritual temporality and sequencing in managing the transition from singleness to marriage and regulating the bride's reintegration into a new, collectively recognized kinship position. The study also aims to highlight patterns of continuity and change in the ritual structure of the Omani marriage process in the context of contemporary social transformations, emphasizing the capacity of ritual to reproduce itself without relinquishing its fundamental kinship function.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to an in-depth anthropological reading of marriage rituals in Omani society as an organized rite of passage rather than merely celebratory practices or inherited traditions. Its primary contribution consists in moving the analysis of Omani weddings beyond descriptive ethnography toward a systematic examination of the ritual and temporal structure of passage and its role in reproducing the kinship system and regulating social recognition of marriage. Moreover, the study addresses a research gap in Arab and Gulf anthropology by drawing on dense oral field material to capture the dynamics of continuity and transformation within ritual practice, and by demonstrating its capacity to adapt to contemporary changes while maintaining its core social function, thereby enhancing our understanding of rituals as effective cultural mechanisms for managing social transition.

2. Methodology, Literature Review, and Case Presentation: This study adopts an anthropological approach that conceptualizes marriage rituals in Omani society as an organized social rite of passage, whose stages are governed by a ritual–temporal structure that regulates the transition from singleness to marriage and reproduces relationships within the kinship system. The theoretical framework is primarily grounded in Arnold van Gennep's theory of rites of passage [6], supplemented by Victor Turner's elaborations on liminality [7,8] as a moment of intense social suspension during which an individual's social position is reconfigured. In addition, selected concepts from symbolic anthropology are employed to elucidate the functioning of symbols within ritual action.

2.1 Rites of Passage Theory and the Marriage Process: Arnold van Gennep's theory of rites of passage [6] constitutes the central analytical framework of this study, as it enables marriage rituals to be understood as a process of transition unfolding through three interconnected stages: separation, liminality, and reintegration. During the stage of separation, the individual is symbolically detached from their previous social status through preparatory rituals that mark the beginning of departure from the world of singleness. The liminal stage represents an intermediate "betwixt and between" phase in which social status is temporarily suspended and specific prohibitions and practices are imposed, reshaping both the body and identity. The stage of reintegration culminates in the individual's reintroduction into society with a new social status that is collectively recognized within the kinship structure.

This model demonstrates that marriage is not accomplished as a momentary event, but rather managed as an extended ritual process whose stages are temporally distributed to regulate social transition and ensure its continuity.

2.2 Liminality and the Temporal Organization of Ritual: Victor Turner's development of the concept of liminality [7,8] deepens the understanding of the intermediate stage of the rite of passage as a symbolic space in which ordinary social rules are suspended and identity and status are reorganized. Liminality is not understood here merely as a temporal phase, but as a cultural mechanism for managing the vulnerability associated with transition and regulating it through ritual performance and collective organization. This perspective enables Omani weddings to be read as moments of social suspension governed through successive rituals that gradually prepare the bride for transition prior to the stabilization of her new kinship position.

2.3 Symbol and Ritual as Mechanisms for the Reproduction of Kinship: The study draws on selected approaches from symbolic anthropology, particularly those developed by Clifford Geertz [2] and Mary Douglas [9], to conceptualize ritual as a symbolic system through which kinship values are embodied. Rituals are not approached as merely formalized practices, but rather as systems of meaning that reproduce collective conceptions of purity, social appropriateness, and belonging through the organization of the body, adornment, prohibitions, and the sequencing of actions. This perspective allows ritual symbols within the marriage process to be understood not as folkloric or aesthetic elements, but as mediating mechanisms that stabilize the new social position within the kinship structure.

2.4 Research Design and Fieldwork Context: Building on this theoretical framework, the study employs a qualitative, anthropological–ethnographic research design grounded in fieldwork based on participant observation and thick description. The aim is to understand marriage rituals in Omani society as an organized rite of passage managed from within, as it is lived and interpreted by social actors themselves. The study adopts an interpretive–hermeneutic perspective that approaches marriage rituals not as occasional celebratory events, but as structured processes of transition, in line with van Gennep's model of rites of passage and Turner's concept of liminality, complemented by tools from symbolic anthropology.

The study does not seek statistical generalization; rather, it aims to produce an in-depth understanding of the ritual structure of the marriage process by tracing the temporal organization of rituals, the sequencing of their stages, and their functions in regulating transition and reintegrating the bride into a reconfigured kinship structure.

Fieldwork was conducted during 2024–2025 in the North Al Batinah Governorate and its six wilayats, selected for their social and cultural diversity and the richness of their ritual practices. The researchers' long-term residence in the region facilitated the establishment of extended social relationships and enabled access to private ritual spaces.

2.5 Sampling and Data Collection: The study relied on purposive sampling aimed at achieving analytical depth and qualitative diversity rather than statistical representativeness. The sample included women from different generations (grandmothers, mothers, and young women) who had participated in marriage rituals as brides, organizers, or ritual attendants, as well as men among guardians and relatives who played active roles in marriage arrangements. The sample also included wedding musicians, chanters, ritual presenters, and selected service providers associated with wedding ceremonies.

Participants were accessed through the researchers' prior familiarity with the local community and through snowball sampling. More than six hundred individual and group interviews were conducted, with attention to reaching theoretical saturation, at which point themes and ritual patterns began to recur without the emergence of new qualitative insights.

Data collection methods included participant observation of weddings and associated rituals, semi-structured interviews, oral history interviews

with elderly participants, systematic field notes, and selected supporting ritual documents.

2.6 Data Analysis: Data were subjected to theoretically guided qualitative thematic analysis. The analysis proceeded through repeated reading, initial coding, axial coding, and the construction of overarching themes related to stages of passage, ritual temporality, ritual performance, symbolism, and patterns of continuity and change. In the final stage, the findings were theoretically integrated with the core concepts developed by van Gennep, Turner, Geertz, and Douglas, allowing the field data to be interpreted as a lived manifestation of the rite of passage within Omani wedding practices.

2.7 Ethical Considerations: The study adhered to established ethical standards in anthropological research. Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Department at Sohar University, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Participant anonymity was ensured through the use of pseudonyms, visual documentation in sensitive spaces was avoided unless explicit permission was granted, and cultural boundaries governing the separation of women's and men's spaces were strictly respected. All collected data were used exclusively for scientific research purposes.

3. Results —The Ritual Structure of the Omani Marriage Process: Field evidence indicates that marriage in Omani society cannot be approached as a set of discrete rituals or as adjacent celebratory displays. Rather, it is more appropriately understood as an integrated ritual process whose stages are organized according to a logic of social passage through which persons are reshaped, relationships are regulated, and the kinship order is reproduced. From this perspective, marriage appears as a temporal–symbolic structure unfolding through successive stages, each with its own functions, meanings, and performative modalities, while remaining internally coherent within the broader cultural system.

This section analyzes the ritual structure of the Omani marriage process in light of the rites of passage model, focusing on the organization of ritual temporality, the distribution of roles, and the production of meaning through the gradual transition from one social status to another.

3.1 The Logic of Passage and the Organization of Ritual Temporality: The Omani marriage process is constructed around a culturally specific conception of ritual time that differs from ordinary, everyday time. Rituals are not performed all at once; instead, they are distributed across a carefully calibrated temporal span that allows individuals and the wider community to prepare psychologically and socially for the anticipated transition. This temporal organization reveals that marriage is not understood as an isolated, instantaneous event, but as an extended passage process managed through preparatory, liminal, and concluding rites that work together to produce the social meaning of marriage and regulate the conditions of its recognition.

This finding aligns with van Gennep's foundational argument that "rites of separation, transition (liminal rites), and incorporation are not always equally developed" [10], indicating that temporal extension and variations in the ritual density of stages do not constitute a defect in ritual structure but rather form part of its organizing logic.

Temporal extension functions as a key mechanism for managing passage: it enables the bride to be gradually detached from her prior social status, to undergo a period of temporary suspension, and then to be reintegrated into the kinship system in a new, collectively recognized position. Oral narratives gathered in the study confirm this understanding of ritual temporality, describing weddings as processes that extend over several days—sometimes even weeks—rather than being confined to the wedding night. One participant explained: "Women start from Monday; the henna lasts three nights; then comes hair washing; then the wedding." This sequence demonstrates that temporal ordering and ritual succession are not perceived as a merely decorative prolongation of celebration, but as a cultural necessity imposed by the logic of passage itself. Each temporal segment performs a specific function in preparing the bride socially and emotionally, suspending her prior identity through ritual repetition, and surrounding her with a women's collective that accompanies the transition and regulates its rhythm. In this sense, time is managed in Omani weddings as a structural component of ritual action rather than a neutral temporal background.

3.2 The Separation Stage: Symbolic Detachment from the World of Singleness: The separation stage constitutes the first link in the ritual marriage process. Here, symbolic detachment from the world of singleness is initiated as a gradual transition that is not achieved through a single isolated act, but through a series of overlapping practices that announce—step by step—the departure of both spouses from their prior social positions. This stage serves a dual function: it redefines the social position of the bride and groom as individuals undergoing passage, and it prepares the social environment to absorb, regulate, and legitimate the transformation. The separation stage therefore involves preliminary rites that accomplish symbolic rupture with singleness without yet achieving incorporation into the new status, thereby opening the pathway to the liminal phase.

Separation rites are expressed in practices such as engagement, the *sharʿi* viewing (a religiously sanctioned pre-marital viewing conducted in accordance with Islamic law) in some families, and the preparation of bridal goods (e.g., *ẓihbah*, dowry-related arrangements, and the bridal chest/*mandūs asscoaited with The bride's trousseau*), which function as initial symbols announcing the beginning of passage. In most oral accounts, engagement is framed as a family and kin-based decision communicated to the parties as a binding social commitment rather than a purely individual choice. One participant described this moment as follows: "The day they told me I was engaged, I felt the world changed. It wasn't just happiness—there was a sense of fear and heightened accountability attached to every step." This account indicates that engagement does not merely declare intention, but initiates a new awareness of social position accompanied by heightened surveillance and responsibility, marking the effective beginning of separation from singleness.

The *sharʿi* viewing is not equally accepted across social milieus. Field material reveals clear variation in attitudes toward it, particularly between urban families and some Bedouin households. While some families treat it as a regulated religious procedure that inserts the bride's body into kin-based negotiation and signals symbolic displacement from her previous status, other Bedouin families regard it as undesirable and sometimes classify it as *ʿayb* (social impropriety), as it implies a symbolic unveiling of the body before ritual completion. One participant stated: "In our family, the viewing doesn't happen. It's shameful for a girl to be seen before the contract. Everything is decided by the family." This variation suggests that the separation stage is not governed by a single ritual template, but by multiple forms that perform the same function through different media, all of which preserve the logic of symbolic detachment while remaining consistent with culturally specific notions of modesty and social appropriateness.

The logic of separation does not apply to the bride alone, although she is more prominent in field narratives due to the centrality of the female body in ritual regulation. The groom—locally referred to as *al-muʿarris*—also undergoes passage through parallel practices enacted in male spaces, such as the public announcement of engagement, intensified visibility in the public domain, and participation in preparatory male rites (including men's henna night in some settings, and rituals such as *al-jalw* and *al-taḥsūnah*). One narrative described this shift: "From the engagement onward, the groom is no longer like before—every act becomes something people حساب [judge and account for]."

A distinctly gendered separation rite is the tearing of the groom's clothing, which functions as a symbolic rupture with singleness through the public dismantling of a prior identity, enacted by the male collective as a ritual authority. This act is not interpreted as celebratory disorder but as a rite of breakage in which the groom is stripped of prior social symbols in preparation for entry into liminality. One narrator described the scene: "On the day of *al-jalw*, the young men hold him and tear his old garment. Everyone laughs and sings, but he stays silent—like they are telling him: one life has ended, and another will begin." Here, the tearing of clothing performs a collective declaration that one status has ended and another is about to commence, achieved through the public cancellation of a material marker of former identity. The rite also highlights gendered differences in the media of separation: whereas the bride's separation is managed through seclusion, concealment, and

gradual withdrawal, the groom's separation is performed through exposure, rupture, and public display within male space. The function, however, remains the same: symbolic detachment from singleness and preparation of body and identity for a new social passage.

3.3 The Liminal Stage: Suspension and Reconfiguration: The liminal stage constitutes the core of the ritual process and its most symbolically dense phase. It is marked by the suspension of stable social positions and, with them, the ordinary rules that govern everyday life. In this phase, the bride is no longer a daughter in her former status, yet she is not fully incorporated as a wife with established rights and obligations. She occupies a "betwixt and between" position in which the body, identity, and social standing are reconfigured. This is a vulnerable moment in which transition is ritually managed through intensified practices, regulated bodily and vocal performances, and symbolic prohibitions that temporarily remove the person from ordinary social time.

Field practices show that ritual is not merely a symbolic expression of transformation, but also a practical mechanism for managing the fragility that accompanies it. This observation resonates with Catherine Bell's argument that ritual operates strategically to organize bodies, spaces, and collective interaction during moments of social instability [11].

Oral accounts indicate that the bride's reconfiguration during this phase takes place within a closed women's space overseen by the women's collective as a ritual authority guarding passage. Elder women—maternal and paternal aunts, neighbors, and senior female kin—take turns visiting and accompanying the bride. As one narrator stated: "During wedding days, older women from the aunts and neighbors must take turns visiting the bride." This rotation indicates a collective function that exceeds social visiting; it serves as symbolic supervision that ensures the bride's adherence to liminal norms, containing the vulnerability of the transitioning body and preventing it from escaping communal regulation.

Symbolic suspension is particularly visible in henna rites and *al-jalw*. *Al-jalw* is described in local accounts as a paste-like substance prepared from sandalwood powder mixed with saffron, rice flour, nutmeg, eggshell, and rosewater, applied to the bride's body. In some local explanations, the application is performed by seven unmarried girls for blessing and the hope of imminent marriage [12]. Alongside these practices, seclusion and concealment regulate the body's movement and visibility. One participant explained: "On henna nights the bride is covered; she doesn't see anyone and no one sees her. Everything is women around her. Even her speech is minimal—like she is not part of the world." Another added: "During the wedding week, the bride wears a veil; if she goes out, only her household sees her." These testimonies show how liminality is produced through bodily concealment, reduced mobility and speech, and intensified female presence, transforming the bride into a subject temporarily outside ordinary social time.

This suspension is not limited to concealment; it extends to acts of collective gifting, such as scattering money over the bride during the henna period. Such practices link social suspension to communal support, emphasizing that the liminal body is managed within a dense network of women's solidarity.

Liminality also reaches a peak in certain male rites enacted on the groom's body, notably staining his clothes and writing on them amidst singing, drumming, and laughter. Drawing on Mary Douglas's framework of purity and danger [9], this practice may be read as a deliberate insertion of the body into a state of symbolic pollution in which social boundaries are suspended and stable classifications are temporarily disturbed. For Douglas, "pollution" is not material dirt but a condition of being "out of place" that signals a temporary rupture in symbolic order [9]. Clothing, as a marker of social order and discipline, is not removed here but deliberately defaced, reflecting a liminal status in which the groom belongs neither fully to singleness nor yet to marital stability. Collective writing on the garment, accompanied by noise and laughter, turns the body into a symbolic surface upon which social identity is re-inscribed within a space where rules are suspended and the vulnerabilities of passage are ritually managed.

In this context, Turner argues that liminality involves high degrees of social vulnerability, as individuals are temporarily stripped of stable classificatory positions, exposing them to ambiguity and symbolic danger and necessitating careful ritual management through collective performance, repetition, and intensified symbolism [13]. Analysis of these practices shows that liminality in Omani weddings is not a passive waiting period but a dense space of social reconfiguration in which prior identities are dismantled and reshaped through body, sound, and collective oversight. These rites do not merely represent passage; they actively accomplish it, preparing for the reintegration of bride and groom into a new kinship position collectively recognized by the community.

3.4 The Reintegration Stage: Stabilizing the New Kinship Position and Reaffirming Social Recognition: The reintegration stage represents the final culmination of the ritual passage process. Here, the bride and groom are reintroduced into the social order after traversing liminal suspension, but with a new social status that has been redefined and publicly recognized. Ritual action at this stage does not only terminate the "betwixt and between" condition; it publicly displays and announces transformation in the public sphere, thereby closing the passage process and stabilizing its outcomes within the kinship structure. This corresponds to van Gennep's stage of incorporation, through which individuals regain social position after suspension but with a newly codified identity [10].

The procession—often referred to as *al-zaffah* or *al-dakhlah*—is among the most meaningful reintegration rites, as it marks the bride's movement from seclusion and suspension to organized public visibility. In this moment, the body that had been hidden during liminality is re-presented as a legitimate, recognized body, and incorporation is achieved through collective movement, sound, and the regulated organization of space. One participant described the moment: "On the day of the *zaffah*, the bride comes out in front of people; everyone sees her and congratulates her." This indicates that the procession is not merely festive display but a ritual of social presentation that signals the end of seclusion and the beginning of recognition, consistent with Turner's analysis of concluding rites as organized re-entry after liminality [13].

Within this stage, the white wedding dress acquires symbolic significance beyond aesthetics, functioning as an incorporation garment that legitimizes public visibility after concealment and signals the formal completion of passage. One woman explained: "As soon as she wears the white dress, we know she has entered a new stage." The dress—along with the crown, flowers, and veil—thus becomes a socially legible temporal marker that closes liminal suspension and opens the horizon of reintegration, aligning with Douglas's insight into clothing as a means of re-ordering the body within social classification after ambiguity [9].

The procession and the white dress operate in conjunction with other ritual elements, including vocal performance (songs, ululations, and blessings) and spatial organization (walking routes, seating arrangements, and the bride's placement) to produce an intensified moment of collective recognition. Collective movement, elevated sound, and the directed gaze toward the bride transform the body into a focal axis of meaning and reinsert it into the social order as the body of a wife rather than that of an unmarried girl. This corresponds to Bell's view of ritual as producing authority and recognition through the organization of bodies, spaces, and interaction [11].

Oral narratives also highlight a significant historical shift in bridal attire from green in the past to white in the present, illustrating how symbolic elements can be reorganized within ritual structure without losing their social function. In traditional weddings, the bridal garment was not primarily an aesthetic choice but a symbol of fertility, continuity, and kin-based belonging. One narrator recalled: "In the past, the bride entered among the women wearing green, and four women would hold a green cloth above her head. The more women around her, the more it meant she was from a family of standing and prestige." This testimony suggests that green operated as a symbol of life, fertility, and the renewal of lineage—meanings directly aligned with marriage as an act of social and kinship reproduction. The surrounding women and the cloth above the bride's head constituted a collective

display of family affiliation, transforming the bride's body into a surface upon which kinship density and social legitimacy were publicly exhibited.

Full social recognition, however, is not produced by the procession alone. It is built gradually through post-wedding rites, most notably *al-ṣabāḥiyyah* (the morning visit/ritual), which functions as a delayed ritual closure of the passage process. In this rite, the bride is presented again in a less dense yet more stabilized setting where her new identity is consolidated through greetings, gifts, and gold. One narrator stated: "In the morning ritual, she is finally a wife in front of everyone." This indicates that *al-ṣabāḥiyyah* does not add a new event, but stabilizes recognition and grants it continuity, consistent with van Gennep's argument that incorporation can be temporally extended rather than instantaneous [10].

Reintegration is further completed through *al-tazwīrah*, when the bride returns to her natal family's home as a wife rather than a daughter, thereby reconfiguring kinship ties without severing them. One participant explained: "She visits her family, but she is not like before," indicating that the ritual does not eliminate prior belonging but reframes it within a newly negotiated kinship position. *Al-tazwīrah* is therefore not an ordinary social visit but a ritual mechanism through which boundaries between prior affiliation and new status are renegotiated.

These practices demonstrate that reintegration in Omani weddings is not reducible to the wedding night but is managed as a gradual process of social recognition accomplished through display, repetition, and ongoing kinship negotiation. Through this process, the rite of passage is symbolically closed, and bride and groom are reintegrated into the social order as a newly recognized kin unit rather than as individuals who merely completed a celebratory episode.

3.5 Continuity and Change: Re-Embedding Ritual Logic under Contemporary Transformations: Interviews and field observation indicate that, in many cases, the Omani wedding has shifted from domestic settings to tents and farms and, more recently, to wedding halls, alongside a reduction in the temporal span of rituals. One narrator stated: "In the past the wedding lasted a week; now it's two or three days—but people still feel it is a wedding." Men involved in organizing weddings confirmed this shift from an organizational perspective. One participant noted: "The difference today is in organization and time, not in the idea… marriage has to be visible to people whether it's at home or in a hall." This account suggests that the move to halls is not locally understood as a rupture with ritual logic, but as a shift in the media through which ritual is accomplished while preserving the function of public announcement and social visibility.

New organizational elements—such as event planning companies and professional photography—have also reshaped and shortened ritual programs, with some components becoming pre-packaged or merged. One woman explained: "Some wedding programs became ready-made: henna, procession, dinner, and the entrance song is played as a recording—whereas in the past women chanted it live with blessings and prayers." A male participant commented: "People want to shorten it, but they can't remove the basic things… without a procession no one will say this is a wedding." Convergence between women's and men's testimonies indicates that transformation has affected form and organization without eliminating the elements viewed as necessary for achieving social recognition of marriage as a public event.

These developments occur within broader social, cultural, and economic transformations experienced by Omani families in recent decades. Yet, as field data indicate, such changes have not dismantled the deeper cultural structures associated with marriage; rather, they have reorganized them within new organizational media while maintaining their symbolic core as a component of family social and spiritual identity [14].

Field material further shows that core wedding rites have not disappeared under organizational and digital transformations; instead, they have been re-embedded within new settings while retaining their symbolic and kinship functions. Henna rites, for example, have not been eliminated, but may be performed in a wedding hall rather than a home, or condensed into a single night instead of three, without losing their meaning as a pivotal rite in the

passage process. One woman stated: "Even if it's in a hall, a tent, or a farm, we must do henna… without it we don't feel the girl has married, and there must be *nashūḥ*." Likewise, the widespread adoption of the white dress in contemporary weddings may be understood as a re-framing of symbolic presentation within a new visual regime rather than a change in the ritual function of dress. White reorganizes the transitioning body within globally circulating symbolism that associates marriage with purity and new beginnings, while preserving clothing as a sign of incorporation and recognition. Just as green once accomplished a collective display of belonging and fertility through the women's group, white now performs a socially recognized display of transition and incorporation within contemporary contexts.

The same logic applies to post-wedding rites such as *al-ṣabāḥiyyah* and *al-tazwīrah*, which may be shortened or merged into a single organizational frame yet remain necessary moments for announcing and stabilizing the new social status. One narrator explained: "The morning ritual is simple now, but people still need to see the bride and congratulate her," confirming that social recognition is not eliminated but reorganized temporally and formally.

Digital media and social networking platforms have introduced an additional layer of display and documentation without replacing direct social presence. Photography, video circulation, and online sharing have become part of the contemporary wedding experience, yet oral accounts reflect a clear critical awareness of this transformation. One woman stated: "Photography has become important, but what matters more is that the wedding satisfies the family. We film and post, but the real joy is when people come and congratulate." This discourse indicates that digital witnessing remains supplementary rather than substitutive: it does not replace the face-to-face collective recognition through which marriage accomplishes its kinship function.

Discussion — Ritual Between Continuity and Re-Embedding in the Omani Context: Interpreted through the anthropological approach to rites of passage, the findings of this study indicate that the organizational, economic, and digital transformations that have shaped Omani weddings in recent decades have not dismantled the ritual structure of the marriage process. Instead, they have contributed to reorganizing the media through which the ritual is accomplished under new social conditions. As the field material demonstrates, marriage is not locally understood as a momentary celebratory event, but as an organized social rite of passage managed through a graduated ritual temporality that produces kinship recognition as a fundamental condition for completing the transition from singleness to marital status.

This observation supports van Gennep's argument that rites of passage should not be assessed by the stability of their forms or the intensity of their outward expressions, but by the continuity of their transitional function within the social structure. Variations in ritual duration and degrees of elaboration do not constitute a disruption of ritual order; rather, they reflect a cultural logic through which passage is adapted to the group's conditions and shifting historical contexts. In this sense, Omani weddings exhibit a high capacity to preserve the logic of the three stages (separation, liminality, and reintegration), alongside clear flexibility in redistributing ritual time and performative media.

The discussion further highlights that the liminal phase constitutes the core of the ritual process in Omani marriage, not as a passive period of waiting but as an active social mechanism for managing the vulnerability that accompanies transition. During this phase, previous identities are suspended, and the body and social status are reorganized through a system of prohibitions, seclusion, and intensified collective involvement. This enables the containment of the "betwixt and between" condition and prevents it from escaping symbolic regulation. This analysis expands the understanding of liminality beyond a temporary symbolic state toward an operative mechanism of social reconfiguration, consistent with Turner's elaborations on liminality as a moment of self-reformation within the group.

At the same time, the study shows that contemporary transformations in wedding settings and organization—including relocation to wedding

halls, temporal compression, the entry of professional intermediaries, and the spread of digital media—are not locally interpreted as a rupture with ritual practice, but as a re-embedding of ritual within new media. Ritual does not disappear with modernization; rather, it redistributes its roles and temporalities in ways that secure the continuation of its core kinship function, namely the public declaration of social transition and the stabilization of the new position within the relational network.

This perspective moves beyond reductionist readings that equate ritual change with cultural loss or erosion, instead approaching transformation as a form of reorganized continuity. As evidenced by Omani weddings, ritual is neither a residue of a static tradition nor a practice destined to vanish, but a flexible cultural structure capable of reproducing itself under shifting temporal and social conditions while preserving its functional core.

On this basis, the study offers a theoretical contribution by reframing marriage in the Omani context as a ritual–temporal process whose stages are socially managed, rather than merely a legal act or celebratory occasion. It also underscores the analytical value of ritual temporality and kinship recognition as central tools for understanding how ritual operates in contemporary Arab societies. Finally, the findings open future research directions, including comparative analysis of ritual time management across different Omani regions and critical examination of forms of kinship recognition in other rites of passage, thereby reinforcing the position of ritual as an effective anthropological lens for interpreting social transformations from within cultural practice itself.

Conclusion: This study demonstrates that marriage rituals in Omani society cannot be understood as residual traditions or reducible celebratory displays, but rather as a living structure of social passage managed through a ritual temporality that accomplishes kinship recognition and reorganizes relationships within the group. The analysis shows that ritual does not merely represent the transition from singleness to marriage; it actively brings this transition into being through a carefully structured distribution of ritual stages and the regulation of the rhythm of passage within social time. This process allows the vulnerability accompanying transition to be contained and transformed into an organized form of collective recognition.

The findings further reveal that the flexibility of ritual and its capacity to adapt to organizational, economic, and digital transformations do not entail a loss of meaning. Instead, they reflect ritual's ability to be re-embedded within changing historical conditions while preserving its core functional logic as a mechanism for producing social recognition and stabilizing a new kinship position. As the field material indicates, change is not locally understood as a rupture with ritual practice, but as a reconfiguration of the media through which ritual is performed, ensuring the continuity of its role within the social structure.

In this respect, the study moves beyond the reductive dichotomy between the "traditional" and the "modern," offering an alternative perspective that conceptualizes ritual as an active cultural instrument for managing social transformation rather than as its victim. By applying the rites of passage model to the Omani context, the study makes a theoretical contribution by reframing marriage as a ritual–temporal process whose stages are socially managed within local culture, rather than as a momentary event reducible to the wedding night.

The study also opens avenues for future research, including intra-Omani comparisons across different regions to explore variations in the management of ritual temporality and forms of kinship recognition, as well as comparative analysis with other Arab societies to examine how ritual operates in the reproduction of kinship within culturally proximate contexts. In doing so, the study reinforces the value of ritual as a central analytical lens for understanding social transformations from within cultural practice itself, rather than through external projections or reductive evolutionary frameworks.

Acknowledgments: The researcher extends her sincere gratitude and appreciation to all participants who generously shared their experiences and knowledge during the fieldwork on which this study is based. She also expresses her thanks to her colleagues, students, neighbors, and to all families in

the North Al Batinah Governorate across its various wilayats, for their cooperation, facilitation of access to the research field, and their valuable contributions to enriching the collected field material. The researcher further acknowledges and appreciates the institutional support provided by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Sohar University, which made the completion of this research possible. This study and the collection of its data would not have been possible without the assistance of a research team drawn from the residents of the North Al Batinah Governorate, across its six cities and various villages. Special thanks are due to Dr. Nawal Al Shirawi and Dr. Aida Al Qasimi, as well as to the esteemed colleagues Zulekha Al Shizawi and Moza Al Muqbali, in addition to a number of outstanding students from Sohar University in the Sultanate of Oman. The researcher extends her sincere gratitude to all of them for their valuable research assistance and their kind cooperation.

Research Grant: The research project leading to these results was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in the Sultanate of Oman under the Performance-Based Institutional Funding Program, Research Contract No. SU/BFP/RG/03/2023.

References

Dawood, D. (2023). *Marriage customs and traditions in Oman: From the day of "al-Ḥaqq" and "al-Milka" to the wedding day*. Resalat Al-Salam.

Saeedi, A. (1998). *The family, its customs and traditions between past and present: Festive practices during holidays as a model*. Insaniyat: Algerian Review of Anthropology and Social Sciences, 4, 41–49.

Al-Ansari, S. bin S. (1991). *Omani customs and traditions*. Muscat: Ministry of National Heritage and Culture Press, Sultanate of Oman.

Al-Mahwashi, M. (2010). *Rituals and the power of symbols: A reading of functions and meanings within a transforming society*. Insaniyat: Algerian Review of Anthropology and Social Sciences.

Bell, C. (1992). *Ritual theory, ritual practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Douglas, M. (1966). *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. London: Routledge.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Inhorn, M. C. (1996). *Infertility and patriarchy: The cultural politics of gender and family life in Egypt*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Inhorn, M. C. (2012). *The new Arab man: Emergent masculinities, technologies, and Islam in the Middle East*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Joseph, S. (1999). *Intimate selving in Arab families: Gender, self, and identity*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Turner, V. (1967). *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing.

Turner, V. (1982). *From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play*. New York: PAJ Publications.

van Gennep, A. (1909). *Les rites de passage*. Paris: Émile Nourry.

van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage* (M. B. Vizedom & G. L. Caffee, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.